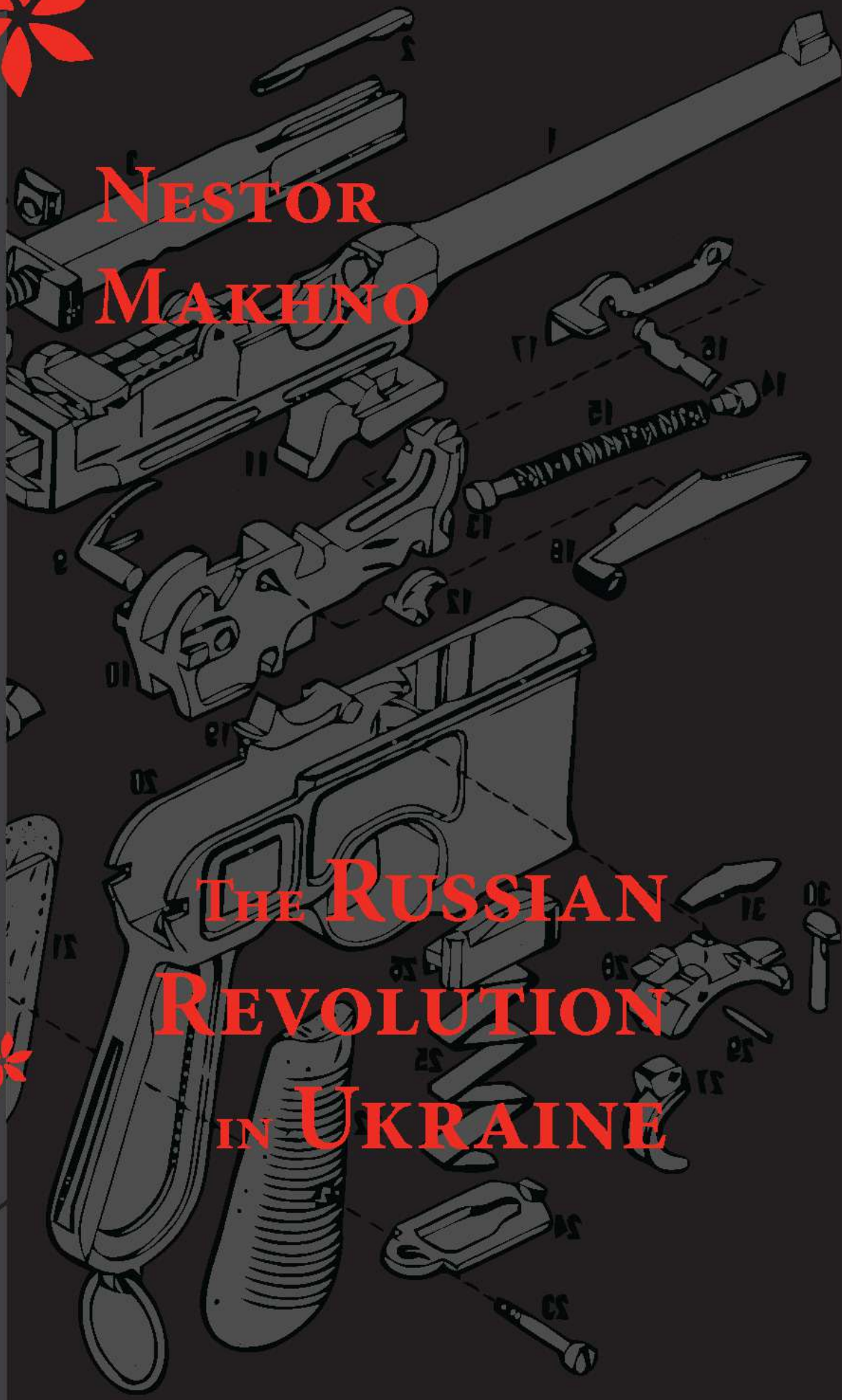
Nestor Makhno

The Russian Revolution in Ukraine



Nestor I. Makhno

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(March 1917 - April 1918)

Introduction by
Sean McInally-Boomer

Black Cat Press
Edmonton

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Translated from the 1929 Russian edition
by Malcolm Archibald

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INTRODUCTION

Nestor Makhno has been called a brilliant partisan general, a dreamer who endeavoured to bring the ideals of anarchism into being on the Ukrainian steppes, a ruthless leader, a bandit, a friend to the Jews and a pogromist. Makhno and his partisans raised the black standard of anarchism across the southern Ukraine from 1919-1920, coming into conflict with Whites, Reds, and Ukrainian nationalists. In spite of being an important and colourful figure of the Russian Revolution, Makhno has been treated as an historical footnote, and even within anarchism is a figure whose achievements are seldom discussed.

Nestor Ivanovich Makhno was born in Gulyai-Polye on October 27th 1889. Raised in a background of poverty and toil, Makhno was sentenced to be hanged at the age of nineteen for a terrorist attack that killed a police officer. Fortunately, his sentence was commuted to indefinite imprisonment. During this period he shared a cell with anarchist Peter Arshinov, whose influence further developed Makhno's anarchism. The political amnesty following the February Revolution of 1917 freed Makhno from the chains of imprisonment and allowed him to take an active part of the revolutionary life of his home in Gulyai-Polye, where he was prominent as a local organizer, chairing two unions, becoming chair of the local soviet, and overseeing the expropriation of local landlords.

Forced to flee by invading Austro-Hungarian forces and their Hetmanite allies, Makhno returned to Gulyai-Polye in July of 1918 to lead a fierce guerrilla resistance to these occupiers. He relied on elements of unpredictability and surprise, and his partisans travelled swiftly across the country, carried by the *tachanka*, a small peasant wagon that could be used to carry men and was often mounted with a machine gun. With the support of the peasantry, Makhno was able to score significant victories against Austro-Hungarians, the Hetmanites, and later nationalists under Petliura.

In the wake of these successes, Makhno sought to realize the creation of a free society in the Gulyai-Polye region. During early 1919, the Makhnovist partisans conducted a series of Regional Congresses of Peasants, Workers, and Insurgents, and encouraged the creation of free soviets-- councils of workers and peasants from which agitators of political parties were excluded. Agricultural communes and an orphanage were also set up with Makhno's encouragement.

Through all this, Makhno remained an outspoken opponent of anti-Semitism. Jews fought as part of Makhno's forces, and were active in his propaganda and political organizing. Not least of these is the anarchist author Voline. Most of the allegations of anti-Semitism made against Makhno appear to have been hearsay, while we have many instances of Makhno acting ruthlessly against anti-Semitic behaviour by the troops under his command.

Makhno's relations with the Bolsheviks wavered. Makhno had first been addressed by Lenin as an anarchist with 'a realistic attitude toward the burning evils of the time.' As his success as a partisan grew, he was lauded in the Bolshevik press as a bold revolutionary. As time went on, relations were to grow strained. Soon the Bolsheviks brought their power to bear against the Makhnovists, as they did against anarchists throughout the emerging Soviet Union. Efforts were made to arrest Makhnovist leaders, to assassinate Makhno, and to crush the movement. Each time the power of the Whites resurged, first under Denikin and then under Baron Wrangel, alliance was hastily resumed, but following the defeat of Wrangel, the Bolsheviks turned for one last time on their erstwhile anarchist allies. In late November of 1920 Makhno's commanders in the Crimea were executed, his staff in Gulyai-Polye imprisoned or shot out of hand, and he himself and his remaining followers had become fugitives. After many struggles and tribulations, Makhno became an exile in Paris.

His last years in Paris were a time of suffering, as Makhno was separated from his beloved Ukraine. His body wracked by tuberculosis, Makhno worked in an automotive plant. He passed away in July of 1934. He remained an ardent anarchist to the very end.

Strangely, Makhno's memoirs have not yet been translated into English. Black Cat's publication of the first volume of Makhno's memoirs is a step toward remedying this. This first volume is of particular interest, as volumes two and three were edited by Makhno's friend and collaborator Voline. Voline and Makhno had many differences regarding anarchist theory, in particular over *The Organizational Platform of Libertarian Communists* by Arshinov and Makhno, a document that Voline opposed. These differences led to a split between the two men in 1926, which was only healed in 1934, before Makhno's passing. Thus, it might be said that volume one, though rougher in many ways than volumes two or three, allows the reader a relatively unfiltered view of Makhno and his ideas.

Black Cat is proud to publish, for the first time in English the first volume of Makhno's memoirs, and is looking forward to publishing the two remaining volumes over the next year.

Sean McInally-Boomer
Edmonton, October 2007

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

"The Russian Revolution in Ukraine" was written by Nestor Makhno in Russian but the first edition, published in 1928, was a translation – into French. A Russian edition appeared a year later. Both these editions have been consulted in preparing the current translation, the first appearance of the book in English. The most recent Russian edition of the book is an abridgement. We have chosen to publish the complete version.

Makhno intended to issue his memoirs of the Russian Revolution and Civil War as a series of books but in fact had only finished the present volume at the time of his death in 1934. Two subsequent volumes were published later by his friends and family but still only took the story up to the end of 1918.

Proper nouns have been transliterated using a system based on Russian orthography. This is unreasonable since most of the work is concerned with Ukraine and Ukrainian was the language of Makhno and his fellow peasants. For example, "Alexandrovsk" should be "Oleksandrivs'k". We hope to correct this deficiency in a subsequent edition.

Footnotes are by the translator unless otherwise noted. Bolded type follows the original Russian edition.

In the part of Ukraine where Makhno was based, most peasants rented their land from large landowners (pomeshchiks) before the Revolution. In Makhno's sociology, the "labouring peasantry" plus the industrial workers constituted the class basis of the social revolution; the term which encompasses both of these groups has been translated as "toilers".

A word about revolutionary etiquette. In the Russian Revolution a fellow revolutionary, even of a different party, was addressed as "Comrade". A non-revolutionary was addressed as "Citizen".

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this volume to the memory of my dead friends and comrades who struggled with me to organize revolutionary Ukrainian workers to bring about a free, anarchist-communist society:

Peter Gavrilenko, Alexander Kalashnikov, Moise Kalinichenko, Simon Karetnik, Philip Krat, Isidor (Peter) Liutii, Alexis Marchenko, Savva Makhno, Andre Semeniuta, Gabriel Troyan, Stepan Shepel, Boris Veretelnik, Kh.Gorelik, Pavel Korostilev (Khundai), Luc Panchenko, Abram Schneider, and others.

They perished under various circumstances but always in pursuit of the same goal: the realization and putting into practice of the concepts of liberty, equality, and free labour.

Nestor Makhno

Preface

On the occasion of publishing the initial volume of "The Russian Revolution in Ukraine" I find it necessary to add a few words of explanation.

In the first place, I must advise the reader that this work lacks a number of important documents: the resolutions and proclamations of the Gulai-Polye Union of Peasants, the Soviet of Workers' and Peasants' Delegates, and their ideological driving force – the Gulai-Polye Peasant Anarcho-Communist Group.

The Anarcho-Communist Group struggled to unite the peasants and workers of the Gulai-Polye region under its own banners. Always in the vanguard of the revolutionary movement, the Anarcho-Communist Group explained to the peasants and workers the significance of unfolding events, clarifying the goals of the workers in general as well as the aims of the anarcho-communist movement which in spirit most closely approaches the peasant mentality.

Secondly, this volume lacks photographs of the members of the Gulai-Polye Peasant Group of Anarcho-Communists, which, accompanied by brief biographical notes, would have occupied the first place in this volume. This group formed an essential part of the Russian Revolution in Ukraine and was the guiding force of the movement to which it gave rise, the "Revolutionary Makhnovshchina". The theory and practice of this movement lead to a whole range of very important issues which I am trying to present to the workers of the world for discussion.

How fitting it would have been to publish photographs of these revolutionaries, who, emerging from the depths of the toiling masses and under my ideological and organizational guidance, created a powerful anti-statist revolutionary movement of the broad masses of Ukrainian workers. As is well known, this movement identified itself with the black banners

of the Revolutionary Makhnovshchina.

To my great sorrow, no possibility now exists of obtaining photographs of these unknown peasant revolutionaries...

This work is an historically accurate account of the Russian Revolution in general and our role in it in particular. My version could only be disputed by those "experts" who, while not taking any effective part in revolutionary events and in fact left behind by those events, have nevertheless succeeded in passing themselves off to revolutionaries of other countries as people with a profound and detailed knowledge of the Russian Revolution. The objections of such experts can be attributed to their failure to understand what it is they are criticizing.

I have one regret concerning the present work – that it is not being published in Ukraine and in the Ukrainian language. Culturally the Ukrainian people are moving forward to the full realization of their unique qualities and this work could have played a role in that development. But if I cannot publish my work in the language of my own country, the fault is not mine but is due to the conditions in which I find myself.

1926 Nestor Makhno

P. S. I must express my deep comradely appreciation to the French comrade Eugene Wentzel who has rendered me invaluable assistance, allowing me to find the time to edit my notes and prepare the present volume for publication.

CHAPTER 1

My Liberation

The February Revolution of 1917 opened the gates of all Russian prisons for political prisoners. There can be no doubt this was mainly brought about by armed workers and peasants taking to the streets, some in their blue smocks, others in grey military overcoats.

These revolutionary workers demanded an immediate amnesty as the first conquest of the Revolution. They made this demand to the state-socialists who, together with bourgeois liberals, had formed the Provisional "Revolutionary" Government with the intention of submitting revolutionary events to their own wisdom. The Socialist-Revolutionary A. Kerensky, the Minister of Justice, rapidly acceded to this demand of the workers. In a matter of days, all political prisoners were released from prison and were able to devote themselves to vital work among the workers and peasants, work which they had started during the difficult years of underground activity.

The tsarist government of Russia, based on the landowning aristocracy, had walled up these political prisoners in damp dungeons with the aim of depriving the labouring classes of their advanced elements and destroying their means of denouncing the iniquities of the regime. Now these workers and peasants, fighters against the aristocracy, again found themselves free. And I was one of them.

The eight years and eight months I spent in prison, during which I was shackled hand and foot (as a "lifer") and suffered from a serious illness, failed to shake my belief in the soundness of anarchism. For me anarchism meant the struggle against the State as a form of organizing social life and as a form of power over this social life. On the contrary, in many ways my term in prison helped to strengthen and develop my convictions. Because of them I had been seized by the authorities and locked up "for life" in prison.

Convinced that liberty, free labour, equality, and solidarity will triumph over slavery under the yoke of State and Capital, I emerged from the gates of Butyrki Prison on March 2, 1917. Inspired by these convictions, three days after my release I threw myself into the activities of the Lefortovo Anarchist Group right there in Moscow. But not for a moment did I cease to think about the work of our Gulyai-Polye group of peasant anarcho-communists. As I learned through friends, the work of this group, started over a decade earlier, was still on-going despite the overwhelming loss of its leading members.

One thing oppressed me – my lack of the necessary education and practical preparation in the area of the social and political problems of anarchism. I felt this deficiency deeply. But even more deeply I recognized that nine out of ten of my fellow-anarchists were lacking in the necessary preparation for our work. The source of this harmful situation I found in the failure to establish our own school, despite our frequent plans for such a project. Only the hope that this state of affairs would not endure encouraged and endowed me with energy, for I believed the everyday work of anarchists in the intense revolutionary situation would inevitably lead them to a realization of the necessity of creating their own revolutionary organization and building up its strength. Such an organization would be capable of gathering all the available forces of anarchism to create a movement which could act in a conscious and coherent manner. The enormous growth of the Russian Revolution immediately suggested to me the unshakable notion that anarchist activity at such a time must be inseparably connected with the labouring masses. These masses were the element of society most dedicated to the triumph of liberty and justice, to the winning of new victories, and to the creation of a new communal social structure and new human relationships.

Such were my cherished thoughts about the development of the anarchist movement in the Russian Revolution and the ideological influence of this movement on revolutionary events.

With these convictions I returned to Gulai-Polye[1] three weeks after my release from prison. Gulai-Polye was my home town where there were many people and things close to my mind and heart. There I could do something useful among the peasants. Our group was founded there among the peasants and there it still survived despite losing two-thirds of its members. Some were killed in shoot-outs, others on the scaffold. Some disappeared into far-off, icy Siberia while others were forced into exile abroad. The entire central core of the group had almost entirely been wiped out. But the ideas of the group had struck deep roots in Gulai-Polye and even beyond.

The greatest concentration of will-power and a profound knowledge of the goals of anarchism are necessary in order to decide what it is possible to gain from an unfolding political revolution.

It is there in Gulai-Polye, in the heart of the labouring peasantry, that will arise that powerful revolutionary force – the self-activity of the masses – on which revolutionary anarchism must be based according to Bakunin, Kropotkin, and a host of other theoreticians of anarchism. This force will show to the oppressed class the ways and means of destroying the old regime of slavery and replacing it with a new world in which slavery has disappeared and authority will no longer have a place. Liberty, equality, and solidarity will then be the principles which will guide individuals and human societies in their lives and struggles, and in their quest for new ideas and equitable relations between people.

These ideas sustained me through the long years of suffering in prison and now I carried them back with me to Gulai-Polye.

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1 Gulai-Polye was a "village" of 17,000 in southeast Ukraine. In 1917 it included food processing plants, founderies, and woodworking shops.

CHAPTER 2

Meeting with comrades and first attempts to organize revolutionary activities

Upon arrival in Gulai-Polye, I immediately got together with my comrades from the anarchist group. Many of my former comrades had perished. Those who survived from the old days were: Andrei Semeniuta (the brother of Sasha and Prokofii Semeniuta), Mosei Kalinichenko, Philip Krat, Savva Makhno, the brothers Prokofii and Grigorii Sharovsky, Pavel Korostelev, Lev Schneider, Pavel Sokruta, Isidor Liutii, Aleksi Marchenko, and Pavel Khundei (Korostilev). Together with these comrades came a younger bunch who had not yet joined the group in my time. But now they had been members for two or three years and were busy reading anarchist literature which they distributed to the peasants. Throughout the whole period of underground activity the group had continued to publish leaflets, printed by hectograph[2].

And how about the peasants and workers, sympathizing with anarchist ideals, who came to visit me? It would be impossible to list them. At that time they really didn't figure in the plans I was devising for the future work of our group.

I saw before me my own peasant friends – unknown revolutionary anarchist fighters who in their own lives didn't know what it means to cheat one another. They were pure peasant types, tough to convince, but once convinced, once they had grasped an idea and tested it against their own reasoning, why then they pushed that idea at every conceivable opportunity. Truly, seeing these people before me I trembled with joy and was overcome with emotion. I immediately decided to start the very next day to carry out active propaganda among the peasants and workers of Gulai-Polye. I wanted to dissolve the Public Committee (the local organ of the Provisional

2 A low technology duplicator using a gelatin surface to transfer an image from a master to paper, good for 20 to 80 copies.

Government) and the militia, and prevent the formation of any more committees. I decided to take up anarchist action as the first order of business.

The visits from the peasants, both men and women, went on continually for a day and a half. Finally, on March 25, these visitors, who had come to meet "the one who rose from the dead" as they expressed it, began to disperse. The members of our group hastily set up a meeting to discuss practical affairs. By this time my enthusiasm for rushing into action had cooled off considerably. In my report I down played for the time being the carrying on of propaganda work among the peasants and workers and the overthrow of the Public Committee. Indeed I surprised my comrades by insisting that we as a group reach a clear understanding of the state of the anarchist movement generally in Russia. The fragmentation of anarchist groups, a phenomenon well-known to me before the Revolution, was a source of dissatisfaction for me personally. I could never be happy with such a situation.

"It is necessary," I said, "to organize the forces of the workers on a scale which can adequately express the revolutionary enthusiasm of the labouring masses when the Revolution is going through its destructive phase. And if the anarchists continue to act in an uncoordinated way, one of two things will happen: either they will lose touch with events and restrict themselves to sectarian propaganda; or they will trail along in the tail-end of these events, carrying out tasks for the benefit of their political enemies.

"Here in Gulai-Polye and the surrounding region we should act decisively to dissolve government institutions and absolutely put an end to private property in land, factories, plants, and other types of enterprises. To accomplish this we must keep in close contact with the peasant masses, assuring ourselves of the steadfastness of their revolutionary enthusiasm. We must convince the peasants we are fighting for them and are unswervingly devoted to those concepts which we will

present to them at the village assemblies and other meetings. And while this is going on we must keep an eye of what is happening with our movement in the cities.

"This, comrades, is one of those tactical questions which we shall decide tomorrow. It seems to me it deserves to be thoroughly discussed because the type of action to be engaged in by our group depends on the correct resolution of this question.

"For us, natives of Gulai-Polye, this plan of action is all the more important as we are the only group of anarcho-communists which has kept in touch with the peasants continuously over the last 11 years. We know of no other groups in the vicinity. In the closest cities, Alexandrovsk and Yekaterinoslav, the former anarchist groups were virtually wiped out. The few survivors are far away. Some of the Yekaterinoslav anarchists stayed in Moscow. We don't know when they will return. And we still haven't heard anything about those who emigrated to Sweden, France, or America.

"At the present time we can depend only on ourselves. No matter how weak we are in our knowledge of the theory of anarchism, we are compelled to work out an immediate plan of action to be undertaken among the peasants of this region. Without any hesitation we must begin work on organizing the Peasants' Union. And we must see to it that one of the peasants from our group is at the head of this Union. This is important for two reasons: first, we can prevent any political group hostile to our ideals from infiltrating the Union; and secondly, by being able to address meetings of the Union at any time on current issues, we shall be creating a close bond between our group and the Peasants' Union. This will give the peasants a chance to deal with the land question themselves. They can go ahead and declare the land public property without waiting for the "revolutionary" government to decide this question which is so crucial for the peasants."

The comrades were pleased with my report but were far from

agreeing with my approach to the whole matter. Comrade Kalinichenko sharply criticized this approach, advocating that our role as anarchists in the current revolution should be restricted to publicizing our ideas. He noted that since we could now act openly, we should make use of this situation to explain our ideas to the workers, without involving ourselves in unions or other organizations.

"This will show the peasants," he said, "that we are not interested in dominating them but only in giving them advice. Then they will look seriously at our ideas and, embracing our methods, they will independently begin to build a new life."

At this juncture we concluded our meeting. It was 7 a.m. I wanted to attend the general meeting of peasants and workers at which the chairman of the Public Committee, Prusinsky, would read the proclamation of the district commissar, giving the official version of the revolutionary upheaval in the country.

For the time being we decided simply to review my report and submit it to further analysis and discussion. Some of the comrades dispersed, others remained with me in order to attend the general meeting together.

* * * * * *

At 10:00 a.m. my comrades and I were at the central marketplace; I viewed the square, the residential buildings and schools. I went into one of the schools, met the principal, and spoke with him at length about the program of instruction, something, incidentally, I knew nothing about. According to the principal, the catechism was part of this program and was zealously defended by the priests and, to some extent, by the parents of the students. I was quite upset. Nevertheless, this did not prevent me, some time later, from becoming a member of the Education Society which subsidized this particular school. I firmly believed that by direct participation in this society, I could undermine the religious bases of

education...

Towards noon I arrived at the general meeting which had just started with the report of the chairman of the Public Committee, Ensign Prusinsky. (At that time in Gulai-Polye was stationed the 8th Regiment of the Serbian Army, to which was attached a Russian machine gun unit with 12 machine guns and a complement of 144 men, led by four officers. During the organization of the Public Committee in Gulai-Polye some of these officers were invited to take part. One of them, namely Prusinsky, was elected chairman of the Public Committee. Another, Lieutenant Kudinov, was elected Chief of the Militia. These two officers, these "public figures", determined the ordering of social life in Gulai-Polye.)

At the conclusion of his report, the chairman of the Public Committee asked me to address the Council in support of his views. This I refused to do and instead asked to speak on another matter.

In my speech I pointed out to the peasants the absurdity of allowing in revolutionary Gulai-Polye such a Public Committee, headed by people who were strangers to the community and who were not accountable to the community for their actions. And I proposed that the assembly immediately delegate four people from each sotnia (Gulai-Polye was divided into seven wards, called sotnias) to hold a special conference about this and other questions.

The elementary school teachers at the meeting immediately rallied to my position. The principal of one small school, Korpusenko, offered his building for our meeting.

It was decided that delegates should be elected at separate meetings of the sotnias and a day was fixed for the meetings. Thus ended my first public appearance after getting out of prison.

Now the teachers invited me to their own meeting. First I got to know them a little better. One of them turned out to be a

Socialist-Revolutionary; the remaining 12 or 14 people were mostly non-Party.

Then we discussed a series of questions related to the inactivity of the teachers. They wanted to take part in public life and were searching for ways of doing this. We decided to act in concert on behalf of the peasants and workers to displace the officer-kulak Committee. This Committee had not been elected by the whole of society but only by its wealthiest elements.

After this I went to a meeting of our whole group.

Here we analyzed my report and Kalenichenko's criticism of it. As a result, we decided to begin methodical propaganda work in the sotnias: among the peasants, and in the mills and workshops. This agitation work was to be based on two premises:

(1) So long as the peasants and workers found themselves in a disorganized state, they would not be able to constitute themselves as a regional social force of anti-authoritarian character, capable of struggling against the "Public Committee". Up to this point the peasants and workers, whether they liked it or not, had been obliged to adhere to the "Public Committee", organized under the auspices of the Provisional Coalition Government. That is why it was important to reelect this Committee in Gulai-Polye.

(2) Sustained agitation must be carried out for the organization of a Peasants' Union, which we would take part in and in which we would exercise the dominant influence. We would express our lack of confidence in the "Public Committee", an organ of the central government, and urge the Peasants' Union to take over this organ.

"This tactic," I told the comrades, "I see leading to the repudiation of government rule with its concept of this type of Public Committee. Moreover, if we are successful in our efforts, we shall help the peasants and workers to realize a

fundamental truth. Namely that once they take a conscious and serious approach to the question of revolution, then they themselves will become the true bearers of the concept of self-management. And they won't need the guidance of political parties with their servant – the State.

"The time is very favourable for us, anarchists, to strive for a practical solution to a whole range of problems of the present and the future, even if there are great difficulties and the possibility of frequent mistakes. These problems are connected in one way or another with our ideal and by struggling for our demands we shall become the true bearers of the free society. We can't let this opportunity pass by. That would be an unforgiveable error for our group, for we would become separated from the labouring masses.

"At all costs we must beware of losing touch with the workers. This is equivalent to political death for revolutionaries. Or even worse, we could force the workers to reject our ideas, ideas which attract them now and will continue to attract them so long as we are among them, marching, fighting, and dying, or winning and rejoicing."

The comrades, smiling ironically, replied: "Old buddy, you are deviating from the normal Anarchist tactic. We should be listening to the voice of our movement, as you yourself called upon us to do at our first meeting."

"You are quite right, we must and we shall listen to the voice of our movement, if there is a movement. At present I don't see it. But I know we must work now, without delay. I proposed a plan of work and we have already adopted it. What else remains to do, except work?"

Well, a whole week was spent in discussions. Nevertheless, all of us had already started work in our chosen fields, in accordance with the decision we had agreed to.

CHAPTER 3

Organization of the Peasants' Union

About the middle of the week, the elected delegates gathered at the school to discuss the re-election of the Public Committee.

For this meeting I, along with some of the teachers, had prepared a general report which the teacher Korpusenko was chosen to read.

This report was well-conceived and well-written.

The elected peasant delegates consulted with the delegates from the factory workers and jointly passed a resolution demanding the re-election of the "Public Committee". At the insistence of the teachers Lebedev and Korpusenko, I contributed some words of introduction to this resolution.

The delegates returned to their own electors and discussed the resolution with them. When the resolution had been confirmed by the electors, a date was set for new elections.

Meanwhile the members of our group were preparing the peasants for the organization of the Peasants' Union.

During this period an agent arrived from the District Committee of the Peasants' Union, formed from the ranks of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party. This was Comrade Krylov-Martynov, who was charged with organizing a committee of the Peasants' Union in Gulai-Polye.

As a former political prisoner, he was interested in my life history, so we met and went to my place to drink tea and talk. And he ended up staying there till the next day.

Meanwhile I had asked the members of our group to prepare the peasants for a general assembly on the next day to deal with the found of the Peasants' Union.

The SR Krylov-Martynov was an effective orator. He de-

scribed in glowing terms to the peasants the impending struggle of the Socialist-Revolutionaries for the transfer of land to the peasants without compensation. This struggle was to take place in the Constituent Assembly, expected to be convened in the near future. For this struggle the support of the peasants was required. He appealed to them to organize themselves into a Peasants' Union and support the Socialist-Revolutionary Party.

This provided an opening for me and several other members of our group to intervene. I said: "We, the Anarchists, agree with the Socialist-Revolutionaries on the necessity of the peasants organizing themselves into a Peasants' Union. But not for the purpose of support the SRs in their future oratorical struggle with the social-democrats and kadets in the contemplated Constitutional Struggle (if indeed it ever comes to be).

"From the revolutionary Anarchist point of view, the organization of the Peasants' Union is necessary so the peasants can make the maximum contribution of their vital energies to the revolutionary current. In doing so they will leave their stamp upon the Revolution and determine its concrete results.

"These results, for the labouring peasantry, will logically turn out as follows. At present the power of Capital and its creature – its system of organized thuggery – the State – is based on the forced labour and artificially-subjugated intelligence of the labouring masses. But now the labouring masses of the countryside and the cities can struggle to create their own lives and their own freedom. And they can manage this without the leadership of political parties with their proposed debates in the Constituent Assembly.

"The labouring peasants and workers shouldn't even be thinking about the Constituent Assembly. The Constituent Assembly is their enemy. It would be criminal on the part of the workers to expect from it their own freedom and happiness.

"The Constituent Assembly is a gambling casino run by political parties. Ask anyone who hangs around such places if it is possible to visit them without being deceived! It's impossible.

"The working class – the peasantry and the workers – will inevitably be deceived if they send their own representatives to the Constituent Assembly.

"Now is not the time for the labouring peasantry to be thinking about the Constituent Assembly and about organizing support for political parties, including the Socialist-Revolutionaries. No! The peasants and the workers are facing more serious problems. They should prepare to transform all the land, factories, and workshops into communal property as the basis on which they will build a new life.

"The Gulai-Polye Peasants' Union, which we are proposing to found at this meeting, will be the first step in this direction..."

The SR agent of the District Party Committee of the Peasants' Union was not perturbed by our intervention. In fact he agreed with us. And so on March 28-29, 1917, was founded the Gulai-Polye Peasants' Union.

The Executive Committee of the Union was composed of 28 members, all peasants, including myself, in spite of my asking the peasants not to nominate me as a candidate. For I was busy opening an office for our group and editing its Statement of Principles.

The peasants honoured my request by nominating me in four sotnias in each of which I was elected unanimously. Thus the Executive Committee of the Peasants' Union was elected.

The peasants proceeded to choose me as chairman of the Executive Committee.

The registration of members in the Union was begun. In the space of four or five days all the peasants joined, with

the exception, naturally, of land-owning proprietors. These defenders of private property in land had isolated themselves from the labouring masses. They hoped to form a separate group, including the most ignorant of their own hired hands. In this way they hoped to hold out until the Constituent Assembly was convened, at which point they could prevail with the help of the Social-Democrats (at that time still vigorously maintaining the right to private ownership of land).

Admittedly, the labour peasantry had no need of such friends as the landed proprietors. Indeed they were regarded as the mortal enemies of the labouring peasants, who realized that only the forcible expropriation of their land and its transformation into communal property would render them harmless.

Unshakably convinced of this idea, which they freely expressed among themselves, the labouring peasantry thus passed judgement in advance on the Constituent Assembly.

So the Gulai-Polye Peasants' Union was organized. But the Union as yet had not absorbed the whole labouring peasantry of Gulai-Polye raion, which included a number of settlements and villages. Therefore the Union could not act in a sufficiently decisive fashion to exert an influence on other raions, and to carry out the organized revolutionary work of dispossessing the proprietors of their land and distributing it for the general use of the community.

So I left Gulai-Polye, along with the secretary of the Executive Committee of the Union in order to make a tour of the raion, establishing Peasant Unions in these settlements and villages.

Upon my return, I reported to my group about our successes, emphasizing the evident revolutionary mood of the peasants, which we were obliged to support with all the means at our disposal, while directing it carefully but firmly towards the anti-authoritarian mode of action.

In our group there was much rejoicing and each member told me about his own work on our project, what sort of impression our work was producing on the peasants, etc.

The secretary of our group, Comrade Krat, who had filled in for me during my absence, told about the arrival in Gulai-Polye of new agitators from Alexandrovsk. They had delivered speeches in favour of the War and the Constituent Assembly and had tried to get their resolutions accepted. But the peasants and workers of Gulai-Polye rejected these resolutions, declaring to the agitators that they were in the process of organizing themselves and were in no position to accept resolutions from outside... .

Each of us was cheered by these encouraging signs, inspiring us to tireless revolutionary activity... .

CHAPTER 4

Examination of the police files

At about this time, the leaders of the Gulai-Polye Militia, Lieutenant Kudinov and his secretary, the inveterate Kadet A. Rambievski, invited me to help them sift through the files of the Gulai-Polye police administration.

Since I attached great significance to these files, I asked our group to appoint another comrade to join me. I considered this matter so important that I was prepared to temporarily set aside all other work.

Some of the comrades, Kalinichenko and Krate in particular, scoffed at the idea of my wanting to help the Militia bosses. Only after a lively discussion did Comrade Kalinichenko acknowledge what had to be done and agree to accompany me to examine the files.

There was a document about Peter Sharovsky, a former member of our group, attesting that he had performed great services as a secret agent of the police... .

I took all the documents with me to the group. Unfortunately, most of the people implicated by the files had been killed in the War. The only survivors were Sopliak and P. Sharovsky, along with Constables Osnishchenko and Bugayev. The last two liked to disguise themselves in civilian clothes during their off-duty hours and go snooping around the homes of people suspected of political activities.

We made a note of these survivors but considered it inappropriate to kill them at the present time. Anyway, three of them (Sopliak, Sharovsky, and Bugayev) were not in Gulai-Polye; they had made themselves scarce shortly after my arrival.

The document about Peter Sharovsky, proving his betrayal of Alexander Semeniuta and Marfe Piven to the police, was publicized by me at a general meeting.

But the documents about the other three were kept secret for the time being. We hoped they would show themselves in Gulai-Polye sooner or later and we would be able to seize them without too much difficulty. The former constable Nazar Onishchenko was now living in Gulai-Polye but never showed himself at councils or meetings. After the Revolution had disbanded the police, he was called up for military service by the new government, but soon contrived to leave the Front and return home.

Shortly after the documents about Sharovsky were publicized, I ran into Nazar Onishchenko right in the middle of town. This was the policeman and secret agent who had once searched my room. He had also permitted himself to search my mother, and when she protested, he slapped her. Now this scoundrel, who was so corrupt he had once turned in his own brother for the reward, rushed up to me in the street and, snatching off his cap, cried: "Nestor Ivanovich! How do you do!" And he extended his hand.

How awful! What a loathing this Judas aroused in me just with his voice, his facial expression, his mannerisms! I began to tremble with rage and screamed at him: "Get away from me, scoundrel, before I put a bullet in you!"

He recoiled and his face turned white as snow.

Without even thinking, I reached in my pocket and nervously fingered my revolver. Should I kill this dog here, or would it be better to wait?

Reason won out over fury and the thirst for revenge. Overcome by my agitation, I made my way to a nearby store and collapsed into a chair at the entrance.

The owner of the store, a shop where flour was sold, greeted me and tried to ask me something but I didn't understand him. I apologized for sitting in his chair and asked him to leave me alone. Ten minutes later I asked a peasant passing by to help me get to the Executive Committee of the Peas-

ants' Union.

The members of our group and the EC of the Peasants' Union learned about my encounter with Onischenko. They insisted on publicizing the document which incriminated him as an agent of the secret police. (That he had been an ordinary policeman was of course well-known to the peasants and workers. He had arrested and beaten up many of them.)

All of the comrades spoke in favour of making public this document, to be followed by Onishchenko's execution.

I objected, entreating the comrades to leave him alone for the time being. I noted there were more important secret agents, Sopliak, for example, who had been a specialist in undercover work, according to the available documents. He had worked for a long time in Gulai-Polye, as well as in Pologui, among the workers at the depot. He had taken part in the manhunt for Comrade Semeniuta.

Bugayev was also an accomplished undercover agent, an expert at disguise. He would go wherever peasants and workers were gathered with his tray of bagels and seltzer water, passing himself off as a pedlar. He was especially active during the period when the Tsarist government had put up a 2,000 ruble reward on the head of Alexander Semeniuta. More than once this Bugayev had disguised himself, together with Police Chief Karachentz and Nazar Onishchenko, and the three of them disappeared for whole weeks. Abandoning their official posts, they drifted about the raion of Gulai-Polye, or the workers' quarters of Alexandrovsk and Yekaterinoslav. Chief Karachentz was killed by Comrade Semeniuta at the Gulai-Polye theatre. Bugyaev, Sopliak, and Sharovsky were still alive and hiding somewhere not far away.

That's why we couldn't touch Onishchenko. We had to fortify ourselves with patience and try to get our hands on the others. According to information from the peasants, they occasionally showed themselves in Gulai-Polye. Therefore I asked

the comrades to leave Onishchenko in peace, in the hopes we could seize all these scoundrels and kill them, because such people are pernicious for any human society. I told the comrades, "These people can't be rehabilitated because they have committed the worst of crimes: **they sold themselves for money and they betrayed their friends**. A revolution must annihilate them. A free society where there is complete equality has no need of traitors. They must all perish, either by their own hands or by the hands of the revolutionary vanguard."

All my friends and comrades now refrained from their insistence that Onishchenko be immediately exposed as the perpetrator of the worst of crimes.

CHAPTER 5

Re-election of the public committee – whether or not to get involved in it

Our group occupied itself for a time with internal matters, giving some structure to the organization and distributing tasks among our members, strong in numbers but weak intellectually (we now had over 80 members). One of these tasks was taking out subscriptions to all the Anarchist newspapers being published in Russia and Ukraine. During this period the re-election of the Public Committee was begun.

Along with some other comrades from our group, I was nominated again by the peasants and was elected.

This was the situation. Some of the peasants abstained from voting. The ones who did take part in the election for the most part voted for members of our group or for people sympathetic to us. In spite of the entreaties of my electors, I refused to represent them on the Public Committee. I did not do so from principle, for I was not aware of what position the anarchists of the cities might have taken on this question of whether or not to take part in such institutions if elected. I had made an inquiry through the secretary of the Federation of Moscow Anarchists but did not receive a reply in time. Rather I refused for a more important reason: my entry into the Public Committee via the usual formal election process would be counterproductive to all my plans, which were geared towards attenuating the power of these committees with their governmental form and functions, while building alternatives with our Group and the peasants.

These plans had been adopted by our group and because of them I had accepted the chairmanship of the EC of the Peasants' Union.

These plans of mine had been designed with several aims in mind:

(1) To create the closest bonds between our group and the whole labouring peasantry on the basis of practical work for the Revolution.

(2) To forestall the infiltration of the peasantry by political parties. The peasants must be convinced of the danger inherent in political parties. They might be revolutionary at a given moment, but, if they succeed in dominating the will of the peasantry, then they will destroy its creative initiative for revolutionary self-activity.

(3) To convince the labouring peasantry of the absolute necessity of acting without delay to seize control of the "Public Committee", a non-revolutionary organism acting under the orders of the central government. This step was necessary so that we could receive ongoing and timely information about the actions of the Provisional Government. Otherwise we could find ourselves at a critical juncture in total political confusion, without accurate and specific reports about the development of revolutionary events in the cities.

(4) To explain to the labouring peasants that the matter of the greatest urgency to them – the conquest of the land and the right to free self-government – must be achieved by them alone. They must not depend on any outside leadership but must rely on their own resources. They must strive to take advantage of the present stage of the Revolution: the new government is in disarray and the political parties are fighting among themselves for power. Now is the time to bring to reality their own revolutionary-anarchist goals.

This principles inspired the plan of action which I had presented to the group of comrades upon my arrival from Moscow. I had nagged, implored, and persuaded the comrades to accept my plans as the basis of our future program of action among the labouring peasantry. Because of these principles I decided to abandon many tactical positions adopted by the anarchist group of the 1906-1907 period. At that time the anarchists were less interested in mass organizational work than

in preserving their own exclusiveness. Isolated in their own circles and groups, they developed abnormally and became mentally sluggish through lack of involvement in practical work. Thus they lost the possibility of intervening effectively at times of popular uprisings and revolution.

My plans were totally accepted by our group of anarcho-communists. Through our activities these plans, refined and corrected, eventually embraced an overwhelming majority of the peasants of Gulai-Polye. In fact this required several months. We shall describe in detail the activities of our Group, which participated fully in the successive phases of the Revolution.

CHAPTER 6

The role of teachers Our work in the public committee

Earlier I said the elementary school teachers of Gulai-Polye had supported us from the time of my first speech before the assembly of peasants and workers. But I neglected to mention what this support was based on. The teachers agreed with my comment that it was shameful for the working intelligentsia to remain inactive at such a critical moment. The peasantry was experiencing great difficulties due to the lack of participation of the intelligentsia in their movement.

Now the teachers threw themselves into practical work. They took part in the elections to the Public Committee, were nominated and elected. Of the 14 teachers in Gulai-Polye, six were elected by the peasants.

The peasantry, with the help of the A-K Group, took a close look at the services rendered by the intelligentsia to the peasants and workers. They observed that historically the activities of the village teachers could be divided into three phases. Beginning in 1900, the teachers had gone to work with enthusiasm to enlighten the village poor. But the reaction setting in after 1905 put an end of this energetic and high-minded impulse on the part of the teachers. Their work in the villages faltered. Only on the eve of the World War did the teachers stir themselves again, with faith and hope, to renew their work in the backward villages. But the War, this sudden, bloody blow against civilization, deflected them from their task. The teachers as a whole became the most fervent patriots, and their cultural-educational work was directed to the profit of the war-effort... .

It's true that only three or four of the Gulai-Polye teachers passed through each of these stages in their own professional careers. The rest were all young and had not yet experienced

such inevitable vicissitudes in their own careers. They all applied themselves sincerely to work with the peasants and workers. Some of them, like A. Korpussenko, G. Belouss, Lebedev, G. Kuzmenko[3], and Maria Alekseyeva, despite having no experience in practical revolutionary work, made every effort to make themselves useful to the vanguard of peasants and workers. In these early months of the Revolution, the teachers did not aspire to direct the movement of peasants and workers. This fact allowed the teachers to work closely and in harmony with the labouring poor.

At first the peasants regarded the teachers with suspicion. But there came a moment, in the exhilarating rush of events, when everyone was inspired with the spirit of the Revolution and came together in the name of its success. Then the peasants and workers accepted the teachers among themselves. At such a moment the peasants elected teachers to the Public Committee. It was also at this time that the Peasants' Union moved to take control of the Public Committee of Gulai-Polye. This control was exercised through its own delegation to the Public Committee. I recall the first day we went to the Public Committee, myself and five comrades. We thought our presence would provoke a scandal, that the Committee would not accept a delegation from the Peasants' Union sent to oversee their work. But things turned out just the opposite. We were met with open arms by those members of the Committee noted for their political chicanery – the representatives of the merchants and shop-owners and those from the Jewish community. These people had got on the Committee to look after their own interests. But now they declared nothing would please them more than friendly collaboration with the peasants in the field of social reconstruction. Up to the moment, it seems, they had not found practical means to convince the peasantry of their disinterested concern. "And now, happily, the peasants themselves have shown the way!" exclaimed one of these slimy characters. So they greeted us,

3 Galina Kuzmenko (1892-1978) was the future wife of Nestor Makhno.

the representatives of the peasants.

Thus six members of the Peasants' Union were co-opted into the Public Committee. It was essential for them to stand firm in this post, so fraught with danger to the cause of the peasants, and not fall under the influence of ideas inimical to the revolutionary goals of the peasantry. Special vigilance was required of members of the Peasants' Union who found themselves in institutions such as the Public Committee, which never made a move without orders from the central government or its agents of the S-R or Kadet variety. The peasant delegates had to remain steadfast in their convictions as they were confronted with problems posed to the labouring classes by the developing Revolution, a Revolution which had so far taken shape only in a political sense. With each passing month the actions of the labouring classes were changing the character of the Revolution, liberating it from its initial political framework.

The Peasants' Union considered the matter of its delegation to the Public Committee very carefully, according to the reports of the A-K Group. The mandate of the delegation was formulated as follows: "The Peasants' Union of Gulai-Polye, empowering six of its members (N. Makhno, F. Krat, Andrei Semenyuta, P. Korostelyev, G. Sepega, and M. Shramko) to attend all the meetings of the Public Committee and monitor its politics, considers it important that members of the Union control the Land Section of the Committee." (From the minutes of the Peasants' Union for April, 1917.)

This last question was crucial for the labouring peasantry as the Land Sections of the Public Committees, following directions from the Centre, were insisting the peasants continue to pay rent to the landlords, pending the resolution of the land question by the Constituent Assembly. The peasants, on the other hand, given some political freedom by the Revolution, considered their slavery and exploitation at the hands of the idle landlords at an end.

The peasants were still badly organized and scarcely prepared to cope with the problems posed by the seizure of land from the landlords, the monasteries, and the State, and its declaration as social property. That's why they insisted the Union should get control of the Land Section. In fact the peasants insisted the business of the Land Section be submitted to the members of the A-K Group. But we, the members of the Group, entreated them not to formulate this demand for the time being, as we wished to avoid premature armed struggle with the authorities of Alexandrovsk (our uyezd). Meanwhile the Group resolved to lead an intensive agitation in Gulai-Polye and the surrounding region to encourage the peasants to pressure the Public Committee to abolish its Land Section and allow them to organize independent Land Committees.

This propaganda was greeted by the peasants with enthusiasm. However, from the central authorities came an order to the Public Committee stating that the Land Sections were part of the Public Committees and must not be abolished but rather renamed "Land Departments"... . (And later, as we shall see, the Land Departments were renamed "Land Committees" by the government itself.)

Carrying out our mandates from the Peasants' Union, we succeeded in gaining control of the Land Department which I was put in charge of. With the support of the Peasants' Union and the Public Committee itself, as well as the approval of the A-K Group, I became for a time the de facto ideological leader of the whole Public Committee.

Our group embarked on this dangerous path thanks solely to my influence. I was driven to this course by my reading of our anarchist press during the first two months of the Revolution. Not a trace could I find of any efforts on the part of the anarchists to create a powerful organization which would master the psychology of the toiling masses and show its organizing skills in developing and defending the nascent Revolution. I saw this movement so dear to me splintered as in the past

into various groupuscles. So I made up my mind to provide an impetus towards unification of the movement by setting an example with an anarcho-communist group from the downtrodden countryside. This was all the more important to me as I sensed a certain disdain for the countryside among our urban propagandists.

CHAPTER 7

The first of May – Relationship of the peasants to the land question

1 May 1917. Ten years had passed since I last participated in this labour holiday so I made a special effort to carry out agitational work to organize its celebration among the workers, the soldiers of the artillery detachments, and the peasants.

I collected all the documents relating to the actions of the workers of the cities during the last days of April and presented them to our group, so that our members could prepare their own interpretations for agitational work among the peasants, workers, and soldiers.

The commander of the 8th Serbian regiment sent a delegation to us to sound us out on the wish of this regiment of the Serbian state to participate with the toilers of Gulai-Polye in the workers' holiday. Of course we had no objection, even when they proposed to take part fully armed. We relied on our own strength which was quite sufficient to disarm this regiment, if necessary.

Demonstrations began in the streets of Gulai-Polye at 9:00 a.m. The assembly point of all the demonstrations was Market Square, now knows as Martyrs of the Revolution Square.

Without wasting any time, the anarchists delivered the news about the actions of the Petrograd proletariat of April 18-22, pressuring the government to dismiss ten capitalist ministers and transfer all power to the Soviets of Peasants', Workers', and Soldiers' Deputies. The anarchists described how these actions were suppressed by force of arms. This news transformed the character of the demonstration which became hostile to the Provisional Government and all the socialists who took part in that government.

The commander of the 8th Serbian regiment made haste to

lead his troops back to their quarters. Part of the artillery detachment declared their solidarity with the anarchists and joined the ranks of the demonstrators.

The demonstrators were so numerous that their procession seemed endless. After passing a resolution, "Down with the Government and all the parties responsible for inflicting this disgrace on us...", they marched through the streets singing the ***March of the Anarchists***. In ranks five to eight abreast it took several hours for their column to pass.

The mood was so elated and hostile to the Government and its agents, that the politicians of the Public Committee and the officers of the artillery detachment took refuge at the headquarters of the Serbian regiment. The only exceptions were two officials who were favourites of the soldiers: the anarchist sympathizer Shevchenko and the artist Bogdanovich. The Militia, which during its brief existence had yet to make a single arrest, disappeared entirely from Gulai-Polye.

The anarchists told the mass of demonstrators about the ***Chicago anarchist martyrs***. The demonstrators honoured their memory by kneeling with bowed heads and then asked the anarchists to lead them without delay to fight against the Government, its agents, and the bourgeoisie.

The day passed, however, without violence.

At that time the authorities of Alexandrovsk and Yekaterinoslav were keeping a close eye on Gulai-Polye and would have liked nothing better than to provoke us prematurely to battle.

The whole month of May was devoted to intensive work in the peasant congresses of Gulai-Polye and Alexandrovsk.

At the Alexandrovsk congress I reported that the toiling peasantry of Gulai-Polye did not trust the Public Committees to carry out the work of the Revolution and had taken control of the local committee. And I explained just how this

was done.

The delegates of the peasants at this congress congratulated the peasants of Gulai-Polye and promised to follow their example. The S-Rs at the congress registered their approval but the S-Ds and Kadets complained that the approach taken by the peasants of Gulai-Polye towards the Public Committees ran counter to the general political line of the new government. According to them the taking over of established territorial administrations (the Public Committees) by a peasant organization was ruinous to the revolutionary cause for it was undermining the prestige of the local government organs.

One of the peasants exclaimed: "You're absolutely right! That's exactly what we're doing. We shall try in each of our districts to subvert the governmental pretensions of these Public Committees until we adapt them to our own outlook, until they accept our right to freedom and independent action in the seizing of the land from the pomeshchiks."

This declaration from the ranks of the peasant delegates sufficed to quiet the S-Ds and Kadets. Otherwise the peasant delegates would have left the meeting hall. The S-Ds and Kadets had no desire to be left in an empty hall for at this period of the Revolution they still hoped to master the revolutionary mood of the toilers.

This congress of Alexandrovsk ended with the passing of a revolution about the transfer of the land into the hands of labouring society without compensation. A provincial committee was elected. The S-Rs rejoiced while the S-Ds and Kadets were furious. The peasant delegates dispersed to their own districts, resolved to organize themselves without the assistance of these political "prattlers", to unify their villages in order to carry out a common armed struggle against the pomeshchiks. "Otherwise," they said, "the Revolution will perish and we shall again be left without land... ."

When M. Shramko and I returned from the provincial con-

gress of Alexandrovsk and reported the results to the Peasants' Union of Gulai-Polye raion, the peasants regretted very much having sent us to this congress. They said: "It would have been better for us not to participate in this congress, rather we should have held our own congress here in Gulai-Polye for the raions of Alexandrovsk uyezd. We are convinced that here we would have made more rapid progress towards our goal of seizing the land for social use. But it's too late now. We hope our Gulai-Polye Committee of the Peasants' Union will make known our position on this question not only to peasants of Alexandrovsk uyezd, but also to those of the adjacent uyezds: Paulogrod, Mariupol, Bediansk, and Melitopol. Let them know we won't be satisfied with resolutions – it is necessary to act."

This stance on the part of the peasants gave rise to the Declaration of the Gulai-Polye Peasants' Union stating that "the toiling peasants of the Gulai-Polye raion believe in their inalienable right to proclaim as communal property the lands of the pomeschchiks, the monasteries, and the State, and intend to carry this into effect in the near future." A special leaflet was issued urging the toiling peasantry to prepare themselves for this act of justice.

The voice of the Gulai-Polye peasants was heard far beyond the borders of Yekaterinaslav gubernia. Delegates from peasant villages in other provinces began to arrive in Gulai-Polye for consultations. This went on for several weeks. As Chairman of the Peasants' Union, I was constantly busy with these delegations.

Comrades from other organizations had to fill in for me in my regular duties while I carried on discussions with the visiting delegates. To some I gave advice, to others direct instructions on how to organize the peasants into unions and prepare them for the seizure of the land. And having seized the land from the oppressors, the next step would be either to set up agricultural communes on the former estates, or divide up

the land and distribute it to the needy.

Most of the delegations told me: ***"It would be a good thing if Gulai-Polye were to act first."***

"Why?" I asked. The answer was always the same: "We don't have any organizers. We read little and hardly any information reaches us. Agitators haven't appeared among us... and we would not even have read the proclamations of your Union and the A-K Group if our sons who work at the Yuzovsky Mine had not sent them to us."

Listening to the voice of the downtrodden countryside, I felt pain but also anger. I cursed the comrades holed up in the cities, forgetting the oppressed countryside. And yet the triumph of the Revolution ultimately would depend on the countryside. Meanwhile the Provisional Government was already beginning to slow down the revolutionary process, to take control. The creative development of the toilers, gradually becoming conscious of themselves and their rights, was being replaced by written programs meaningless for the real life of the country.

And the more this mental anguish tormented me, the more I was moved to search out the most out-of-the-way corners of the countryside, together with my comrades, to tell the peasants the truth about their situation and about the state of the Revolution. I was willing to set aside all commitments in Gulai-Polye for the moment, to carry this message to the peasants, for unless they threw their fresh energies into the struggle, the Revolution was doomed.

This work kept me away from Gulai-Polye for several days. At this time I was cheered by the imminent return of P. A. Kropotkin to Russia, knowing he would draw the attention of the comrades to the oppressed countryside. And who knows? – maybe our old mentor, Uncle Vanya (Nikolai Rogdaev), who had been so active in Ukraine in tsarist times, would also return, along with other comrades less well-known but

very active in the old days. Then our activity would get a real boost. The toiling masses would receive thoroughgoing replies to the questions which tormented them. The voice of anarchism would be heard everywhere in the oppressed countryside and would collect and group under its banner the toiling masses to do battle with the pomeshchiks and factory owners for a new world of freedom, equality, and solidarity among all the people.

I believed in this project to the point of fanaticism, and on its behalf I became more and more absorbed in the everyday life of the peasants and workers. I strongly urged the Gulai-Polye Anarchist Group to do the same.

CHAPTER 8

The workers' strike

Early in June the anarchists of Alexandrovsk invited me to a conference being held to unify all the local anarchists into a federation. I came immediately to help the comrades come to an agreement. The Alexandrovsk anarchists were all manual or intellectual workers. Formally they were divided into anarcho-communists and anarcho-individualists, but in reality they were all revolutionary anarcho-communists. All of them I esteemed as the closest of friends and I did my best to help them set up a federation. After organizing themselves, they began to organize the workers and for a time had a great ideological influence on them.

When I returned from Alexandrovsk, the workers of the Gulai-Polye Union of Metal and Carpentry Workers invited me to help them set up their union and sign up as a member myself. And when I did this they asked me to direct their impending strike.

Now I was completely absorbed, firstly by the affairs of the Peasant's Union, secondly by the workers. However, among the workers there were comrades with a better grasp of workplace problems than myself, for which I was grateful. I undertook to lead the strike, hoping to win over these fine comrades and draw them into our Group. One of them – V. Antonov – was sympathetic to the S-Rs. The others were non-party. Of these especially energetic were Seregin and Mironov.

Before declaring the strike, the workers of both foundries, all the mills, home workshops, blacksmith's and joiner's shops held a meeting. The upshot was that I was asked to formulate their demands and present them through the union executive to the owners of the enterprises. While this was going on it became clear to me that comrades Antonov, Seregin,

and Mironov had been working as anarchists for quite some time in the workshop committees. In fact Antonov had been elected chairman of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies. These comrades had not joined our Group only because they were overloaded with their work in the shops. Naturally I was against this. From the day of my return from prison I had insisted on the necessity of our Group being well-informed about the work of all our supporters among the peasants. So I strongly urged these comrades to join the Group immediately and in future to coordinate with us their own work in the workshop committees and among the workers generally. The comrades entered the Group and then joined with me in summoning the proprietors of all the enterprises in order to present them with the workers' demands, which reduced simply to: a wage increase of 80 to 100 percent.

Such a proposal from the workers aroused a storm of protest from the proprietors who categorically refused a wage hike of any such proportions. We gave them one day to consider our position while the workers continued to work at their machines. The next day the proprietors came to the Union Soviet with their own counter proposal of a 35 to 40 percent wage increase. As representatives of the workers we considered this offer insulting and, after a lengthy debate which became abusive on both sides, we offered them one more day to reconsider, as required by civil law. The proprietors and their agents, some of whom knew the constitutions of trade unions by heart and were socialists by conviction, left the meeting assuring us they would not be returning the next day with an offer higher than the one already on the table. They knew the central authorities would back them up.

We called together the members of the workshop committees and representatives from the home workshops and discussed a simultaneous work stoppage for the following day, timed to coincide with the moment when the proprietors would leave the trade union Soviet after arriving without a new offer. It was decided that the Soviet must plant one of its supporters

at the telephone exchange to connect my telephone directly with all the workshops. Then I could advise the workers of the rejection of their demands and the owners, upon returning to their enterprises, would be greeted by demonstrations of striking workers.

I now proposed to the members of the Trade Union executive and factory committees a plan of expropriation of all the money capital to be found in the enterprises and the Gulai-Polye Bank. I had no illusions about our ability to take over the enterprises, even with this cash at our disposal. The uyezd and gubernica Public Service Committees as well as the commissars of the central government would send troops. And these troops, hoping to win favour with the central authorities and avoid being sent to the front to face the Germans, would shoot the best militants of the workers, myself in particular. It was important to me to bring forward the idea of expropriation of capitalist enterprises at a time when the Provisional Government had still not succeeded in controlling the labouring masses and diverting them counter-revolutionary ways.

However, the majority of members of the trade union and factory committees earnestly requested that I refrain from presenting such a plan of action to the mass of the workers. They said we weren't ready for such a step, justified though it might be, and premature action on our part might jeopardize any possibility of carrying out such a program in the future, when we would be better prepared.

After a frank discussion, the members of the Group came to the same conclusion. If my proposals were carried out now, the workers would have to depend on the peasantry to sustain them by expropriating the estates of the pomeshchiks. Practically this wouldn't be possible until the fall harvest. Thus we would be taking a fatal step.

These conclusions shook me. I no longer insisted on immediate expropriation of the factories and workshops. But I

urged that my proposal be accepted as the basis of the work of the factory committees – namely to prepare the workers to carry out expropriation in the near future. I assured the worker comrades that the peasants were also thinking along the same lines and said we must devote all our strength to coordinate the aspirations of both peasants and workers that they might be realized in practice simultaneously.

My position was adopted. At that time I was elected by all the workers as chairman of the Trade Union and Mutual Aid fund. Comrade Antonov was selected to be my deputy and replacement in the event of my being overloaded with work in other organizations.

The peasants also chose a comrade as a back-up who could replace me. But in both cases the rank-and-file insisted any initiatives come from me and that I coordinate the activities of both organizations.

* * *

The proprietors of the factories, mills and workshops came again to the Trade Union Soviet. Their position had not changed from the previous day. After two hours of bargaining they had a fit of generosity and agreed to increase wages by 45 to 60 percent. My response, as chairman of the meeting, was to declare our negotiations at an end. "The Trade Union Soviet has empowered me to take control over all public enterprises directed by you, citizens, but not rightfully belonging to you. We shall settle with you on the street in front of your respective businesses. Meeting adjourned!"

I collected my papers and headed for the telephone. At this moment, the owner of the largest factory in Gulai-Polye, Michael Borissovitch Kerner, got up from his seat and exclaimed: "Nestor Ivanovich, don't be in such a hurry to end the meeting. Personally I consider the workers' demand totally justified. They are right to expect us to comply with their proposal and I, for one, will sign my agreement to this... ."

The other proprietors and especially their agents cried indignantly: "What are you doing, Boris Michaelovich?"

"No, no, gentlemen, you do as you wish. I'm obligated to satisfy the demand of my workers," replied Kerner.

I told them all to calm down, called for order, and asked: "Citizens, you're all sticklers for law and order. Is it legal to re-open the meeting to discuss the same question which led to its adjournment?"

"Certainly, certainly!" was heard from all the proprietors and their agents.

"Then I declare the meeting open and propose that all of you sign the contract raising the workers' wages by 80 to 100 percent." And I handed out copies of the contract previously prepared. Feeling rather faint from fatigue and nervous tension, I handed over the meeting to comrade Mironov and retired to another room to take a short break.

Half an hour later I returned to the meeting hall. The proprietors began to sign the text of my proposed conditions. When they had all signed and left the Union hall, I sat at the telephone and called the worker-comrades in all the enterprises about the success of our negotiations, about the acceptance of our demands, and advised everyone to stay at their jobs until evening. And in the evening the members of the Union Soviet made detailed reports about our collective victory... .

From that time on the workers of Gulai-Polye and the surrounding region prepared themselves and organized all their workplaces. They studied the economic and administrative aspects of their enterprises and readied themselves for the seizure and direct management of these businesses.

Also from this time Gulai-Polye attracted the special attention of the Yekaterinoslav Public Committee, along with the Ukrainian nationalist "Selganska spilka" [Peasants' Union], the Provincial Soviet of Workers', Peasants', and Soldiers'

Deputies, and the Provincial Industrial Committee, not to mention various Alexandrovsk organizations controlled by agents of the Provisional Government. The visits to Gulai-Polye of instructors, organizers, and propagandists from these places became more frequent.

But these agents always left without results, stymied by the actions of the peasant- and the worker- anarchists.

CHAPTER 9

Some results

Let's move on to the "Public Committee" and look at how we, delegates from the Peasants' Union, made use of the authority of this Committee in our region.

In the first place, having taken over the Land Department, we also tried to ensure that the Department of Provisioning was also an independent entity. When the time came that I had taken over the whole Committee, myself and some of my comrades on the Committee demanded the abolition of the Militia. When the central authorities would not allow this, we deprived the Militia of the right to make independent arrests and searches and thereby reduced its role to acting as a courier service for the Public Committee. Furthermore, I summoned all the landowners and kulaks and collected from them all the documents concerning their acquisition of privately-owned land. By means of these documents the Land Department produced a precise account of all the wealth in land at the disposal of the pomeshchiks and kulaks for their idle life-style.

We organized as part of the Soviet of Workers' and Peasants' Deputies a Committee of Batraks and created a batrak movement against the pomeshchiks and kulaks who were living on their labour.

We established practical control of the batraks over the pomeshchik and kulak estates and khutors, preparing the batraks to unite with the peasants and act together to expropriate all the wealth of individuals and declare it the social property of the toilers.

After all this, I personally was already losing interest in the Public Committee as an institution through which, within the framework of the existing order, one could do things legally which would keep the Revolution moving forward among the

oppressed toilers in the countryside.

After consulting with a number of different comrades, I proposed to the whole group to establish an obligation for all our members: to propagandize among the peasants and workers urging them to change by any means possible their Public Committees, which tended to be less dependent on the will and rights of the peasants and workers than on the orders of some government commissar.

"Indeed," I said, "The Public Committees as territorial extension of the government cannot be revolutionary entities around which the living forces of the Revolution can group themselves. As the Revolution develops they must disappear. The labouring masses will dissolve them. The Social Revolution demands it.

"Taking a look now at the Social Revolution, we must work in the name of its ideas, we must help the peasants and workers move forward. We cannot allow the Public Committees to ignore the will of those who elected them. All their decisions (decisions and orders of the government) must be presented at general meetings – meetings of all citizens – for approval or rejection.

"It is now the end of June. That means that we, peasant and worker anarchists, have had four months to work legally among the oppressed toilers. It seems to me we have accomplished something in this time. Now we need to draw the proper conclusions from our experiences. Then we shall embark on new activity which reflects the ultimate goal of our movement. This activity must take place outside the Public Committee. We now have connections with a whole series of regions where our ideas carry influence. And among them is Kamishevatsky raion where our comrades are playing a leading role in everything. This raion has already responded to our request for support in our struggle against the Alexandrovsk Public Committee. The representative from this raion, Comrade Dudnik, has visited us three times in order

to coordinate the actions of the workers of the Kamishevatsky region with the actions of the Gulai-Polye workers. With each passing day the workers of other raions pay more attention to the voices of Gulai-Polye and organize themselves according to our principles, in spite of attempts to dissuade them on the part of the S-Rs, S-Ds, and Kadets. [At that time there were no Bolsheviks in the villages.]

"After a serious, four-month study of the Revolution, we know it is time to move forward in a definite direction and to directly oppose the activity of the politicians – those of the right already in power and those of the left striving for power, because the right-wing socialists and the bourgeoisie, who have appropriated the Revolution for themselves, are leading it into a blind alley. For us, working in the oppressed villages, it was evident from the first days of the Revolution that the Ukrainian peasantry had not yet had time to liberate itself entirely from the yoke of slavery and to grasp the real sense of the Revolution. The peasantry has hardly begun to shake off this heavy, ancient yoke and is already looking for ways to liberate itself from economic and political slavery. The oppressed villages are looking to the anarchists for help. It would be very easy for us to ignore the oppressed peasantry and not hasten to help them. We would just be adopting the attitude of our comrades in the cities and we would be repeating the false logic of these comrades who regard the peasants as partisans of a return to a bourgeois-capitalist system, etc. But I believe we won't do anything of the sort. We've seen how things are working out in our own village and, based on our experience, we know there are revolutionary elements among the downtrodden peasants in other villages. It's only necessary for us to release them from the garrote of statism which has been applied to them by the politicians. We revolutionary anarchists can render them reliable help.

"Our movement in the cities, on which our more senior comrades pinned such unrealistic hopes, is clearly much too weak to deal with problems of such vast scale and responsibility.

I'm not saying that there are not people in our ranks who are capable of great things. Indeed there are such people. In our current work we need to take a close look at this problem: when there is responsible work to be done demanding tenacious efforts many of our comrades have avoided it in the past and are avoiding it now. This has contributed to and will continue to contribute to disorganization. Oh! How dangerous is this disorganization for the healthy life of our movement! Nothing can compare to it. Thanks to the disorganization of our movement as a whole, our best forces are dissipated even now during the Revolution without any benefit to our movement. This phenomenon has always hindered us but now we anarchists suffer from it more than ever. It prevents us from creating a powerful organization, indispensable for playing an effective role in this Revolution. Only such an organization would be capable of responding to the suffering cry of the Revolution. And the current appeal from the downtrodden villages is just such a cry of the Revolution. If we had the organization, then we anarchists would be able to respond to this appeal.

"It is painful to dwell on this, but it is extremely necessary. Each of us, comrades, who haven't forgotten the ultimate goal of the Revolution, who haven't lost themselves in nebulous and sterile theories, but who are sincerely searching for the most effective means of elevating and realizing our ideal in the life of the masses – each of us will not cease to protest against disorganization because it represents an immense danger for our movement. But to protest is not sufficient. I say: we must work and work, tirelessly, not stifling in ourselves that uplifting revolutionary spirit, and especially not hindering the revolutionary development of others. With the help of this spirit, the anarchist ideal will generate fresh forces and allow us to create an organization which will get us moving in the right direction."

CHAPTER 10

Struggle against rent

The month of June. The peasants of the Gulai-Polye raion refused to pay the second installment of their land rent to the pomeshchiks and kulaks. They hoped that after the harvest they would seize the land themselves without entering into any negotiations with either the owners of the government which protected the owners. Then the peasants would divide the land between themselves and any factory workers who wished to cultivate it themselves.

Several other uyezds and raions followed the example of Gulai-Polye.

In Alexandrovsk there was alarm among the government authorities and their agents from the Socialist and Constitutional-Democratic Parties – the S-Rs, S-Ds, and Kadets. With the technical and financial assistance of the Public Committees and the government commissar, the revolutionary uyezds and raions were inundated with party propagandists-agitators, appealing to the peasants not to undermine the authority of the Provisional "Revolutionary" Government which, they said, was very concerned with the fate of the peasants and intended in the very near future to convene the Constituent Assembly. And until this "competent" institution convened, and until it has issued its opinion about land reform, no one had the right to infringe on the ownership rights of the pomeshchiks and other landowners. And hastily, on orders from the top, the Land Departments were renamed Land Committees and separated from the Public Committees as independent entities. These Land Committees were invested with the right to collect from the peasants the rent for land rented by them from the pomeshchiks and kulaks. The local raion Land Committees were supposed to send these payments to the uyezd Land Committees which would then hand over the money to the landowners.

The propagandist-agitators of the various parties brazenly told the peasants that the pomeshchiks and kulaks still had huge taxes to pay for their land. "Our revolutionary government," they said, "is demanding payment and the 'poor' landowners have nowhere else to get the money than from the peasants to whom they rented their land."

A bitter struggle took place between the A-K Group of Gulai-Polye and the Peasants' Union on the one hand – and these agents and the government bureaucracy which supported them on the other hand. And under the protection of the government were the well-organized rural, industrial, and commercial bourgeoisie. The peasants at the meetings held by order of the government commissars dragged down from the podium the representatives of those groups which supported the Provisional "Revolutionary" Government and beat them for their abominable speeches, hypocritically adorned with revolutionary phrases, designed to deflect the peasants from their main goal: to take possession of their own historical legacy – the land.

In some locales, the bewildered peasants, doubting their own just strivings, gathered their last kopeck to pay their rent to ferocious landowners, who were supported by the Church, the State, and its hired servant – the government.

But even those peasants who were lead into error did not lose hope for victory over their enemies. They listened with great attention to the call of the A-K Group and the Peasants' Union: "Don't lose hope and bravely prepare for the next battle with the enemy."

This is what I said at the time at a meeting of thousands of peasants and workers in Gulai-Polye, inspired by the main idea of an appeal launched by the A-K Group and the Peasants' Union (I was speaking in the name of both organizations):

"Toilers! Peasants, workers, and you worker-intellectuals who have taken sides with us! We have all seen how, in the space of four months, the bourgeoisie has organized itself and

skillfully drawn into its ranks the socialists, who have become its faithful servants. If the propaganda carried out among the peasants in favour of paying rent to the landowners, even during this revolutionary time, does not provide sufficient proof, let me cite other facts, comrades, which you will find even more convincing:

"On July 3 the Petrograd proletariat rose up against the Provisional Government, which in the name of bourgeois rights was trying to suppress the revolution. For example, the government suppressed a bunch of Land Committees in the Urals which were acting in a revolutionary manner against the bourgeoisie. The members were thrown in prison. We have seen the same thing with our own eyes, where agents of the government – socialists – are urging the peasants to pay rent to the pomeshchiks. From the 3rd to 5th of July the blood of our brother-workers flowed on the streets of Petrograd. The War Minister, the socialist Kerensky, summoned several tens of thousands of Cossacks – historically executioners of the free life of the labouring classes –to suppress the revolt. The socialists in the government went crazy in the service of the bourgeoisie and together with the Cossacks killed the best fighters of our working class brethren. By doing this the socialists are inviting the labouring classes to retaliate against them and against the bourgeoisie which has incited these odious, totally unjustifiable acts.

"What will result from this crime of the enemies of our emancipation and of the peaceful, happy life to which we aspire? A fight to the finish! But not only that! No good can come out of this for us. In the first place it harms the revolution, so long awaited and finally here but still not fully developed. The labouring masses have still not awakened from the mind-numbing slavery which has oppressed them for centuries. They are still feeling their way as with extreme caution they present to the new hangmen their demands for freedom and their rights to an independent life. But these rights, comrade, are met with the cannons and machine guns of the powerful...

"Let us be strong, brother workers, so strong that the enemies of our freedom, of our genuine liberation from everything evil and hateful, feel this strength in us.

"Let us go forward with sure steps towards self-organization and revolutionary self-activity! The future, the not too distant future, will be ours. We must get ready for it... ."

After me spoke a Ukrainian S-R who beseeched the toilers of Gulai-Polye to remember that as a counterbalance to the "foul Provisional Government in Petrograd, in Kiev existed 'our' Ukrainian Government in the form of the Central Rada. It was genuinely revolutionary, the only government on Ukrainian soil capable and competent to restore freedom and a happy life for the Ukrainian people". In conclusion he exclaimed:

"Drive the katzaps from our land! – Death to these suppressors of our native tongue! In our native land long live 'our' power – the Central Rada – and its Secretariat!... ."

But the toilers of Gulai-Polye were deaf to the appeal of the Ukrainian "Socialist-Revolutionary". Not only that, but they shouted at him in unison: "Down from the tribune! We don't want your government!" Then they passed the following resolution:

"We pay our respects before the bravery of the working class warriors who fell in battle with the Provisional Government on July 3-5. We, the peasants and workers of Gulai-Polye, will not forget this government atrocity... . Death and damnation on the Provisional Government and the Government of Ukraine – the Central Rada and its Secretariat, the worst enemies of human freedom".

For a long time after this discussion and the resolution voted by the peasants and workers, the Russian and Ukrainian natinalists and the state-socialists cursed me and the whole A-K Group, because it was henceforth impossible for them to sing the praises of their various governments and their role in the toilers' lives in Gulai-Polye. The toilers looked upon

them as hired agents and they were constantly interrupted when they tried to praise government power.

So day after day passed, accumulating into weeks and months, as my comrades and I circulated through the countryside, propagandizing the ideas of anarchism.

Soon arrived the 2nd Congress of Peasants' Unions of our uyezd, and our Union did not fail to send two delegates, Comrade Krat and myself. The Congress was crowded. Everyone said what had already been said many times. The Russian and Ukrainian S-Rs, the former represented by S. S. Popov, the latter by the teacher Radomsky, put on a display of solidarity before the peasant delegates by agreeing to work together in the struggle for land and freedom for the peasantry. After each had expounded his party's program, they stood before the podium and shook hands.

The peasant delegates from Gulai-Polye, Kamishevansky, Pozhdestbensky, and Konno-Razdorsky raions told them: "It's all very fine that you are agreeing to struggle together for land and freedom, but where and against whom do you intend to struggle?"

"Everywhere and with anyone who does not want to hand over land to the peasants without compensation," replied the S-R delegates.

"But ultimately we will finish our struggle in the Constituent Assembly," said the S-R. Popov.

"In the All-Ukrainian Seim!" added the teacher Radomsky.

And here was a small difference of opinion between the S-R allies. They exchanged opinions in whispers while on the benches of the peasant delegates some were laughing, the others frowning.

At the end of the Congress representatives were elected to go to the Provincial Congress of the Peasants' Unions and Soviets of Workers', Peasants' and Soldiers' Deputies.

In elections of delegates from the Uyezd Congress to the Provincial Congress, we, the Gulai-Polye delegates, abstained. We declared our protest against the fact that delegates to the Provincial Congress were not elected directly by the grassroots. This abstention led to us being treated as disturbers of electoral law and order and therefore violently criticized by the leaders of the congress – the S-Rs, S-Ds, and Kadets who said we were the only delegates who did not want what the peasants wanted. This provoked more laughter from the peasant delegates which soon became disruptive whistles when the big shots tried to speak.

We, the delegates of the Peasants' Union of Gulai-Polye, protested once more against the method of elections, insisting that the delegates to the Provincial Congress be elected directly by the peasants. Such an election would give a true picture of the revolutionary peasantry throughout the whole province, we said. But again we were treated as incorrectly understanding the interests of the peasants. The "leaders" of the congress proposed to bring up our point of view at the Provincial Congress of peasants and workers.But since we refused to participate in the elections to Provincial Congress from the delegates of the Uyezd Congress, then we could not stand as candidates and were thus excluded from the Provincial Congress.

However, we had numerous reasons to believe that the organizational bureau of the Provincial Congress would directly invite delegates from Gulai-Polye because of an exchange of opinions which had taken place between the Peasants' Union of Gulai-Polye and the Provincial Committee of the Peasants' Unions. But the initiative for this would have to come from Yekaterinoslav, not Gulai-Polye, i.e. not directly but in an indirect fashion. So we were not certain of participating in the Provincial Congress and returned to Gulai-Polye with a gloomy feeling that we had suffered a defeat on this occasion.

However, our line of behaviour at the Congress was the cor-

rect one from our point of view, and we were not worried about the revolutionary future of our Peasants' Union. When we got back home we made a report to the Executive of the Peasants' Union as well as the Union of Metal and Carpentry Workers which always took an interest in peasant congresses and asked to be informed about them. And then we made a report to a general meeting of peasants and workers in Gulai-Polye and district. At the same time we prepared the peasants and workers to send delegates to the Provincial Congress even without an invitation. Our goal was to expose the attitude of the leaders of the Uyezd Congress which had just ended and also to inform the peasant delegates to the Provincial Congress about how the S-Rs, S-Ds, and Kadets had tried to stifle the revolutionary initiative and self-activity of the peasantry, how their agitator-propagandists with the assistance of the government commissars travelled around the cities and villages holding meetings where they duped the peasants and squeezed rent money out of them for the benefit of the pomeshchiks, rendering thus more difficult the situation of the peasants who, impoverished by the ravages of war, had not taken part in pillaging and brigandage like the pomeshchiks and kulaks, and were not able to acquire the money necessary to pay the landowners for the land which these thieves had appropriated.

But while we were preparing for the Provincial Congress, and also giving advice to the peasants of raions and uyezds belonging to other provinces, the Executive of the Peasant Union of Gulai-Polye received from the Provincial Soviet of Workers', Peasants', Soldiers' and Cossacks' Deputies an invitation to send two delegates to the Provincial Congress of Soviets and Unions of Peasants', Workers', Soldiers' and Cossacks' Deputies.

We decided to call a congress of the Gulai-Polye Raion Peasant Union. At this time the Executive of the Union prepared a report appropriate for the agenda of the Provincial Congress.

CHAPTER 11

P. A. Kropotkin arrives in Russia – Meeting with Yekaterinoslav anarchists

Around this time we received news that P. A. Kropotkin was already in Petrograd. The local newspapers had written about this, but we, peasant-anarchists, not hearing his powerful appeal to anarchists and his detailed instructions about how the anarchists should begin to overcome the fragmentation in their own movement so we could take our rightful place in the Revolution, did not believe the newspapers. But now we received newspapers and letters directly from Petrograd indicating that P. A. Kropotkin had been taken ill on the journey from London to Russia but had safely arrived at the very heart of the revolution – Petrograd. We heard about how he had been greeted by the socialists in power, in particular by A. Kerensky.

The joy in the ranks of our group was indescribable. A general meeting of the group was called which was devoted exclusively to the subject ***What Does Our Old Friend Peter Alexeyevich have to tell us?***

We all came to the same conclusion: P. A. showed us the concrete way to organize our movement in the villages. With his sensitivity and his lively comprehension, he saw the absolute necessity for the villages to have the support of our revolutionary force. As a true apostle of anarchism, he recognized the importance of this unique moment in Russian history and, using his moral influence on the anarchists and their groups, he hastened to formulate in a practical way the guidelines of revolutionary anarchism which must inspire the anarchists in this Revolution.

I composed a letter of welcome in the name of the Gulai-Polye Peasant Group of Anarcho-Communists and sent it, if I remember correctly, to Peter Alexeyevich care of the editorial

staff of the newspaper "Burevestnik".

In this letter we greeted P. A. Kropotkin and congratulated him on his happy return to his country, expressing our belief that his country, in the person of its best people, has been waiting impatiently for the return of a tireless fighter for the highest concepts of justice, who could not help but influence the unfolding and realization of the Russian Revolution...

We signed: the Ukrainian Anarcho-Communist Group of the Village of Gulai-Polye, Yekaterinoslav Province.

We didn't expect an answer to our modest welcoming letter. But we waited impatiently for an answer to the burning question of the moment, without which we would be wasting our efforts for our goal might not be the same as the goal of other groups or it might be the same but we might be working towards it in a completely different way. It seemed to us that the downtrodden countryside posed this direction question: "How do we go about seizing the land and, without submitting to any authority, drive out the parasites who produce nothing and live a life of luxury at our expense?"

The response to this question had been given by P. A. in his work "The Conquest of Bread". But the masses had not read this work, only a few individuals had read it, and now the masses no longer had time to read. What was necessary was that an energetic voice exposed to them in clear, simple language the essential points of "Conquest of Bread" to prevent them from sinking into a speculative inertia, and to show them directly the right path to take and furnish a guide for their actions. But who could provide this lively, strong, straight-forward voice?

Only an anarchist-propagandist and organizer!

But, placing my hand on my heart, I asked: were there ever in Russia or Ukraine schools of anarchist propaganda? I had never heard of any. But if there were, then where were the advanced militants who had graduated from them?

Twice I traveled through several raions and uyezds belonging administratively to the same province, and I did not run into one situation where, in answer to my questions: "Have you had here any anarchist animators?" they would answer: "There have been." Everywhere they answered: "We have never had any such. And we are very happy and grateful that you have not forgotten us.".

Where were the forces of our movement generally? In my view they were vegetating in the cities where they were often doing things they shouldn't have been doing.

The arrival of P. A. and his active participation in the Revolution (if his advanced age allowed such a thing) would hopefully give a strong push to our comrades in the cities. Otherwise the oppressed countryside would be enslaved by the political parties and, through them, by the power of the Provisional Government, and that would put an end to the subsequent development of the revolution.

My opinions drew support from those comrades who, working in the factories, had not traveled about the region and sampled the mood of the oppressed peasants directly. Those, on the other hand, who knew the villages, sharply criticized my thinking. They detected in it hesitation and doubt as to the revolutionary mood of the villages. "The villages," they said, "have well understood the intentions of the agents of the different socialist parties and the bourgeoisie who have been coming around to them on behalf of the Provisional Government and would never under any circumstances allow themselves to be duped by these agents."

Indeed there were signs of this mood in the villages, but in my view these signs were weak. At this critical moment in the Revolution, the peasants needed to feel that they had better support, especially for their revolutionary activists, so that they could bring about permanent change by getting rid of the existing privileged classes and not allowing new ones to take their place.

Two weeks went by. No news from Petrograd. We didn't know how P. A. viewed the role of our movement in the Revolution: ***Were we on the right track? Or was it correct to concentrate our forces in the cities, paying little or no attention to the oppressed peasantry?***

* * * * * * *

During this period of expectation arrived the time of the Provincial Congress of Soviets of Workers', Peasants', Soldiers', and Cossacks' Deputies and the Peasants Unions. [August 5-7, 1918]

An assembly of the Peasants' Union was held in Gulai-Polye. We discussed the agenda of the Provincial Congress. We spent a lot of time discussing the re-organizing of the Peasants' Unions into Peasants' Soviets and finally decided to send delegates to the Provincial Congress. I was elected representative of the peasants, and Comrade Seregin was elected representative of the workers.

I was particularly happy to go to Yekaterinoslav where I hoped to make contact with the Anarchist Federation and discuss all the questions which were of interest to our Group (especially the question: why are there no anarchist agitators going from the city into the villages?).

I deliberately arrived at the Congress a day early. From the railway station I went directly to the Federation's office. I found there the secretary – Comrade Molchansky, an old friend from Odessa. We knew each other in prison. With great joy we embraced each other.

I immediately pressured him: what were they doing in the cities? Why didn't they send organizers around the whole province?

Comrade Molchansky, waving his hands excitedly, said: "Brother, we don't have the forces. We're weak. We've only just pulled together a group and we've hardly attended to the

workers in the local factories and soldiers in the garrison. We hope that with time our strength will increase and then we can establish closer links with you and the villages and begin more energetic work in the countryside... ."

For a long time after this we sat quietly and looked at each other, each of us absorbed in thinking about the future of our movement in the revolution... . And then Comrade Molchansky began to reassure me, affirming that in the near future there would arrive in Yelizavetgrad Rogdaev, Roshchin, Arshinov and a bunch of other comrades and the focus of our work would be shifted into the villages. Then he led me into the Federation's club, which had earlier been known as the "English Club".

There I found many comrades. Some were arguing about the Revolution, others were reading, a third bunch were eating. In a word, I found an "anarchist" society which did not allow, as a matter of principle, any order, any authority, and which did not devote a moment to propagandize among the mass of toilers in the countryside who were in such dire need of this propaganda.

Then I asked myself: why did they requisition from the bourgeoisie such a large and well-appointed building? What use is it to them when, in this babbling crowd, there is no order even in the animated discussions with which they resolve the most important problems of the Revolution? Meanwhile the hall is not swept, in many places chairs are overturned, and the big table, covered with luxurious velvet, is scattered with lumps of bread, fish heads, and picked bones.

I observed all this with a heavy heart. At that moment into the club came Ivan Tarasiuk (actually Kabas), comrade Molchansky's deputy. With anguish and indignation he yelled, at first quietly, then at full voice: "Whoever ate at this table, clean it up!"... . Then he began to straighten the chairs... .

Quickly everything was removed from the table and people

set about sweeping the floor.

From the club I returned to the Federation office and picked out a bunch of brochures to take to Gulai-Polye. I was intending to go to the office of the Congress to get a billet for the duration of the event when a young woman entered who turned out to be a comrade. She asked the comrades present to go with her to the Winter Theatre to back her up in a debate with the S-D "Nil" who was winning over a good number of workers. But the comrades present told her they were busy. Without another word she turned and left.

Comrade Molchansky asked me: "Do you know her? She is a fine, energetic comrade." I immediately left the office and overtook her. I proposed that we go together to the meeting but she answered: "If you will not speak, you will not be necessary to me there." I promised her I would speak.

Then she took me by the hand and we hurried to the Winter Theatre. This young and charming comrade told me along the way that she had become an anarchist three years earlier. It wasn't easy for her. She had been reading Kropotkin and Bakunin for about two years. Now she felt that the works she read had helped to confirm her convictions. She had become an active proselytizer. Up until July she had spoken before worker audiences but had not dared to debate with the enemies of anarchism – the social democrats. In July at one of the open air meetings she debated "Nil". He had whipped her. "Now," she said, "I'm going to try as hard as I can to go up against 'Nil" again. He is the agitational superstar of the S-Ds."

Our conversation ended there.

At the meeting I spoke against the celebrated "Nil", using the pseudonym "Skromny"[4] (my nickname in prison). I spoke badly although my comrades later assured me that I had been very good, just a little nervous.

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4 "The Modest One" in Russian.

As for my young and energetic comrade, she won over the whole hall with her pleasant but strong speaking voice: the auditorium was delighted with this voice and there was dead quiet when they listened to what she said, changing to stormy applause and thunderous cries: "Excellent, excellent, Comrade!

The comrade didn't speak long, 43 minutes, but she stirred up the mass of listeners against the positions espoused by "Nil" so that when the latter tried to respond to all those who had spoken against him, the entire hall erupted against him: "That's not true! Don't make up false stories – the anarchists are telling the truth – you are telling lies!... ."

When we returned from the meeting, several comrades joined us. Our young comrade said to me: "You know, Comrade Skromny, this 'Nil" with his influence over the workers up to now has been driving me crazy. I have set myself the goal of destroying his influence, whatever the cost. There's only one thing holding me back – my youth. The workers are more trusting of older comrades. I'm afraid that this will prevent me from fullfilling my duties to the workers... ."

I could only wish her further successes in her revolutionary anarchist work, and we separated after promising to meet the next day to speak about Gulai-Polye about which she had heard good things.

This meeting caused me to arrive late at the office of the Congress and I was unable to obtain a hotel room. So I spent the night in Comrade Seregin's room.

I devoted the whole next day to the Congress and could not find a moment to meet with the young comrade as I had promised her. The second day of the Congress I was occupied the whole time at the Land Commission. Here I met with the Left S-R Schneider, sent to the Provincial Congress from the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of Soviets of Workers', Peasants' & Cossacks' Deputies and elected to the Land

Commission of the Congress. The Commission unanimously passed a resolution about socializing the land and passed this resolution on to the presidium of the Congress. After this the Commission asked Comrade Schneider to make a report about what was happening in Petrograd.

He made only a brief summary as time was lacking, he said, and asked us to support the resolution about re-organizing the Peasants' Unions into Soviets. This re-organization was, subsequently, approved by the Congress. This was the only question on the agenda at the Congress which had not been considered at the meeting in Gulai-Polye.

On our return from the Congress, and after a series of reports, the Peasants' Union of Gulai-Polye was transformed into a Soviet of peasants; its principles were not modified nor were its methods of struggle which it was intensively preparing the peasants to use in its upcoming struggles. It appealed to the workers to drive out the owners of the factories and plants and to liquidate their right of private ownership of social enterprises.

During this time, while we were busy with the formal transformation of Union into Soviet, in Moscow on August 14 opened the All-Russian Democratic Conference and on its tribune appeared our esteemed,dear elder – Peter Alexeyevich Kropotkin.

Our A-K Group of Gulai-Polye was dumbfounded by this news, although we appreciated very well that it was difficult for our old friend, after so many years of work and being shunted about foreign lands, preoccupied in his old age with humanitarian ideas, to return to Russia and refuse his assistance to this Democratic Conference. But all such considerations had to take a back seat to the tragic crisis in the Revolution which immediately followed this Conference.

We condemned our old friend for taking part in the Conference. We naively imagined that the former apostle of

anarchism had transformed himself into a sentimental old man searching for peace and quiet and the strength for applying his knowledge to life one last time. But this blame we kept inside our group, and our enemies were not aware of it, because deep down Kropotkin remained for us the greatest and strongest theoretician of the anarchist movement. We knew that if he were not so advanced in years, he would have put himself at the head of the Russian Revolution and would have been the uncontested chief of anarchism.

Whether we were right or not, we never discussed with our political enemies the question of the participation of Kropotkin in the All-Russian Democratic Conference of Moscow... .

Thus with a sinking feeling we listened to what P. A. said. We didn't lose faith that he remained always dear and close to us, but the revolutionary moment called us in a different direction. For a number of reasons of purely artificial character, the Revolution showed signs of reaching an impasse. On it was fitted a noose by all the political parties participating in the Provisional Government. And all these parties were gradually becoming more entrenched in power and becoming in themselves a threatening counter-revolutionary force.

CHAPTER 12

Kornilov's march on Petrograd

Around August 20 1917 our group reviewed the distribution and utilization of our forces. This meeting was the most serious one we had held. I have already mentioned that our group did not have in its ranks a single theoretically-trained anarchist. We were all peasants and workers. Our schools turned out half-educated people. Schools of anarchism did not exist. Our fund of knowledge of revolutionary anarchism was obtained reading anarchist literature for many years and exchanging views with each other and with the peasants, with whom we shared all that we had read and understood in the works of Kropotkin and Bakunin. We owe thanks to Comrade Vladimir Antoni[5] (known as Zarathustra) for supplying us with literature.

Vladimir Antoni

In the course of this very important meeting we discussed a number of burning questions and came to the conclusion that the Revolution was having the life choked out of it by the garrote of the State. It was turning pale, weakening, but could still emerge victorious in the supreme struggle. Help would come to it principally from the revolutionary peasant masses who would remove the garrote and get rid of this plague – the Provisional Government and its satellite parties. Drawing some conclusions from our analysis for practical activity we formulated a series of positions, namely:

The Russian Revolution has, from the beginning, posed a clear choice to the Russian and Ukrainian anarchist groups, a choice which imperiously demands a decision on our part. Either we go to the masses and dissolve ourselves in them, creating from them revolutionary cadres, and make the Revolution; or we

5 Vladimir Antoni (1886-1974) was one of the founders of the original anarcho-communist group in Gulai-Polye. When the police suppressed the group he managed to escape abroad but kept in touch with the anarchists in Gulai-Polye.

renounce our slogan about the necessity of social transformation, the necessity of carrying through to the end the workers' struggle with the powers of Capital and the State.

To remain as before, restricted to isolated group activities, limited to publishing pamphlets, journals, and newspapers and holding meetings – was impossible. At this time of decisive events, the anarchists risked finding themselves completely isolated from the masses, or dragging along behind them.

Anarchism, by its very essence, cannot accept such a role. Only a lack of understanding and enthusiasm on the part of its adherents – the anarchist groups and federations – created the possibility of dragging it down the wrong path.

Every militant group, the revolutionary anarchists in particular, must try to draw the labour masses to its side at the moment of insurrection or revolution. At the moment when they begin to show confidence in the group, it must, without being carried away, follow the broken path of unfolding events (a path which may be revolutionary but not anarchist) and seize the right moment to draw the labouring masses in the right direction.

This is an old method, but one not experienced by our movement in practice, and one which will not be experienced until such time as we master certain organizational principles and create our own organization. A serious movement requires strategic planning. A movement without a definite organization of forces is a bunch of uncoordinated groups, frequently ignorant of each other and even taking conflicting actions in relation to their political enemies. Such a movement could, certainly, be created at the revolutionary moment, but it would be impossible to infuse it with a lasting existence, to give it a credo which could guide the revolting masses towards genuine liberation from their economic, political, and moral chains. There would just be a useless loss of human lives, sacrificed in a struggle both necessary and just in its goals, but unequal.

After having observed for seven months the anarchist move-

ment in the cities, our group could no longer ignore the very numerous militants who failed to recognize their role and were stifling the movement, preventing it from liberating itself from the traditional forms of disorganization and transforming itself from grouplets into a mass movement. That is why our Group threw itself with renewed energy into the study of problems not yet solved by the anarchist movement, for example: the problem of coordinating the activities of different groups as events unfolded. None of the federations which sprang up after the February Revolution had formulated an answer although they all published their resolutions and indicated their view of the way forward.

That's why, after having feverishly searched for a guiding rule in the works of Bakunin, Kropotkin, and Malatesta, we arrived at the conclusion that our group of anarchist-communist peasants of Gulai-Polye could neither imitate the anarchist movement of the cities, nor could we listen to its voice. We could count on no one but ourselves at this critical moment in the Revolution. It was up to us to help the downtrodden peasants realize that they must create the Revolution themselves in the villages, that it is up to them to determine the character and the course of the Revolution. We must not let their faith in themselves be shaken by the political parties and the government which have done nothing to create the revolutionary movement in the villages.

And the group dispersed among the downtrodden toilers of the countryside, leaving only an information office; by word and action the Group helped the toilers get their bearings at that moment in the Revolution and inspired them to a great intensity in their struggle.

In a very short time after adopting our decision, as we began already to notice the fruits of our organizational activity in the raion, we became convinced that we had been correct in our perception of stagnation in the Revolution and the critical situation full of mortal menace. The Revolution found itself definitely in the noose which the statists needed only to tighten

in order to strangle it.

The introduction of the death penalty at the Front was direct evidence that revolutionary soldiers must die on the external Front, while the counter-revolutionaries could continue their work at the very heart of the Revolution. Revolutionary military units, which were fraternizing with workers in the cities and with peasants in the villages, were beginning to see themselves as slaves of militarism and were thinking of using the tools provided them – cannons and machine guns – against their real enemies. Now those units with a revolutionary attitude were being ordered to the Front, as being too dangerous to the growing forces of the counter-revolution.

Seeing all this and recognizing how the way was being prepared for strengthening the power of the bourgeoisie, already recovering from its original defeat by the Revolution and ready to get its revenge, we were still more strongly convinced that our method of helping the toilers to correctly orient themselves at this critical moment was the true method. However, it was imperative to complete the process and issue clear directives.

What had we accomplished with our actions?

We had ensured that from the end of August the peasants had completely understood us and would not allow their ranks to be splintered into various political groupings, thereby dissipating their power so that they were incapable of achieving what was strong and durable in the Revolution.

The better the peasants understood us, the more strongly they believed in themselves and in their direct role in the Revolution. Their role was, firstly, to abolish private ownership of land and to proclaim it social property; and secondly, with the help of the urban proletariat, to abolish any possibility of new privileges

And thus we arrived at those days when our gloom and doom about this anxious moment in the Revolution received its full

justification. We received news from the Provisional Government itself and from the Petrograd Soviet of Workers', Peasants', Soldiers' and Cossacks' Deputies that the commander-in-chief of the external Front, General Kornilov, had withdrawn from the Front a division of soldiers loyal to him and was advancing on Petrograd to liquidate the Revolution and its conquests.

That was on August 29, 1917. An anarchist from Aleksandrovsk, M. Nikiforova[6], had arrived and organized a meeting which I chaired. While she was speaking, a courier delivered a packet in which I read the news about Kornilov's advance. I broke into her speech and made a brief statement about the bloody repression which was threatening the revolution. Then I read two telegrams from the Government and from the All-Russian Executive Committee of the Soviet of Workers', Peasants', Soldiers', and Cossacks' Deputies.

This news produced a painful impression on the peasants and workers present. They tried to contain their emotions, but someone cried out from the crowd: "The brothers' blood is already flowing, but here the counter-revolutionaries are walk around freely, laughing at us!" He pointed at the former Gulai-Polye political cop Citizen Ivanov. Comrade Nikiforova jumped down from the tribune and arrested him while the crowd hurled abuse at him.

But I also jumped down and went to Nikiforova and Ivanov, already surrounded by a bunch of comrades from our Group and the Peasants' Soviet and insisted that the constable be released. I told him to relax, that no one was going to touch him. Then I made my way back to the tribune and told the peasants and workers that our struggle in defense of the Revolution should begin not with the murder of a former policeman like Ivanov, who had turned himself in without resistance in the first days of the Revolution and had not gone into hiding.

6 Maria Nikiforova (1885-1919), usually known as Marusya, had joined an anarcho-communist group at the age of 16 like Makhno. She was also sentenced to a long prison term for terrorist activities like Makhno but managed to escape abroad. Returning to Russia after the Revolution, she was active in the "July Days" in Petrograd before returning to her home town, Alexandrovsk.

"All we should do with the likes of him is keep an eye on him. Our struggle must find expression in a more serious way: what exactly I'm not going to say right now because we need to have an emergency meeting of the Peasants' Soviet together with workers from the A-K Group; but afterwards I promise to come back and explain my ideas."

All the members of the Soviet had gathered. When I arrived the meeting was started. I read the dispatches and next presented my report on what we needed to do and how we were going to do it. The dispatch from the Petrograd Soviet suggested the formation of local "Committees for the Salvation of the Revolution".

The meeting assigned members to this Committee from its own ranks, expressing the wish that it call itself the "Committee for the ***Defense*** of the Revolution" and entrusted me to direct its work.

We, the members of this hastily knocked together organization, got together and decided to begin disarming all the bourgeois in the region and liquidating their rights to the wealth of the people: on the land, in the factories and plants, in the printshops, theatres, circuses, cinemas and other public enterprises.

We considered that this was the only sure way to liquidate both General Kornilov's movement and the rights of the bourgeoisie to dominance over the toiling masses.

During the time that I was at the meeting of the Soviet, and then the meeting of the Committee for the Defense of the Revolution (all this took about five hours), the mass of toilers was still awaiting my return to finish my speech on how to defend the Revolution.

When, finally, I arrived back, all the members of the Soviet, the members of the Group of Anarcho-Communists, and some members of the Trade Union were parading up and down the street with rifles and shotguns on their shoulders. Gulai-Polye

had been transformed into an armed revolutionary camp.

I went through the gate into the public garden and made my way to the square where the tribune was situated. The peasants and workers had broken up into groups dispersed throughout the garden and were animatedly exchanging opinions about the disturbing news. They gathered around me rapidly, saying: "Well! Are you finally free? Are you going to finish what you were starting to tell us? The bad telegrams prevented you!"

I climbed up on the tribune exhausted, because I had been travelling all over the raion in the preceding days, promising myself that I would only have one meeting on Sunday and then I could rest. But the disquieting telegrams, which the peasants called "bad", did not allow me any time to rest.

Finishing my thought about the defense of the Revolution, I clarified that no one except they themselves could defend and further develop it. The Revolution is their business and they must be its bold propagators and its real defenders.

I next told them what had been decided at the assembly, that a Committee of the Defense of the Revolution had been formed which was destined to combat not only the movement of General Kornilov but also the Provisional Government and all the socialist parties which shared its ideas. I added that this Committee would become effective only when everyone, no matter who, adopted it as their own. As we group ourselves around this Committee, I said, we will sustain it not just with words but with actions.

I presented in shortened form to the large audience the program of action of this Committee.

From the crowd were heard cries of "Long Live the Revolution!" And these were cries not of activists used to carrying on in this way at political meetings, but truly spontaneous cries coming from the depths of the soul of the people.

"What now, Comrade Nestor," sounded several voices, "should we prepare to go fight at the side of the city workers?"

I explained to them a point from the program of action of the Committee in which it was said that the peasants by "sotnias", and the workers by factories and workshops, must discuss our resolution and tomorrow (August 30) send us their delegates with their final decision.

With this ended August 29, 1917. It was a depressing day because of the news about General Kornilov's movement. But then it pushed the masses to take the initiative and engage in revolutionary self-activity. And wherever among the workers were found revolutionaries who understood the tasks at hand, there the theoretical side of events was discussed and a plan of action formulated to guide the masses in their direct struggle.

On the next day early in the morning I walked to Cathedral Square in Gulai-Polye. Groups of workers from the plants and peasants from the sotnias were marching along the street under black and red banners and singing as they proceeded to the building of the Soviet of Peasants' and Workers' Deputies, in which was located the "Committee for the Defense of the Revolution". I sprinted through the courtyard of the building and then into the front yard of the Soviet in order to meet the demonstrators. When they spotted me they broke into a thunderous shout: "Long Live the Revolution! Long Live Its True Son, and Our Friend, Comrade Makhno!"

These shouts were flattering for me, but I felt I didn't deserve them from the toilers. I stopped these enthusiastic shouts and asked them to listen to me. But the crowd picked me up and carried me on their hands, crying "Long Live the Revolution! Long Live Comrade Makhno!"

Finally, I prevailed upon the demonstrators to listen to me and when they had quieted down I asked them in honour of what they had come to the Committee for the Defense of the Revolution?

"We have come to put ourselves at the disposition of the Committee," was the response, "and we are not alone."

"You mean there's still life in the old dog?!"

"Yes, yes, and again yes!" cried the demonstrators.

I began to feel dizzy, I almost wept with joy because of the great spirit of the Ukrainian peasants and workers. Before me was embodied the peasant will for freedom and independence, which only the Ukrainian spirit can so quickly and strongly display in such breadth and depth.

My first words to the demonstrators were: "Listen, comrades, if you have come to put yourselves at the disposal of the Committee for the Defense of the Revolution, then I propose that you divide yourselves up into groups of 10 or 15, with 5 to a wagon, and don't lose any time – cover the whole Gulai-Polye raion and visit the pomeshchiks' estates, the kulak khutors, and the rich German colonies and confiscate from the bourgeoisie all the fire-arms you can find: rifles, muskets, shot-guns, even swords. But do not harm in any way, either by word or gesture, the bourgeoisie themselves... . With revolutionary honour and courage we must do this in the interests of the Revolution. For the leaders of the bourgeoisie, taking advantage of the negligence of the revolutionaries, have organized their forces under the protection of the Provisional Government and have already taken up arms against the Revolution.

"As the representative of the Soviet of Peasants' and Workers' Deputies of the raion, the A-K Group, and the Soviet of the Trade Union, I am authorized to direct our revolutionary movement on an interim basis, while at the same time remaining the chief commissar of the Committee for the Defense of the Revolution. As such I consider it appropriate to say to all the comrades setting out to disarm the bourgeoisie that they must not get carried away and be involved in pillaging. Pillaging is not a revolutionary act, and so long as I am at the head our movement any delinquent parties will find themselves before the Tribunal of the Revolutionary General Assembly of Peasants and Workers of Gulai-Polye.

"In the course of two or three days we must disarm the bourgeoisie and turn in all weapons to the Committee for the Defense of the Revolution for distribution to the real defenders of the Revolution. So don't waste time, break up into groups, be sure to take a certificate from the Committee verifying your official role in confiscating the arms we need from the bourgeoisie. Go!"

When the peasants realize that something has to be done, they quickly get it done. As soon as I mentioned to the demonstrators that they should split up into groups, with five to a wagon, immediately people went to fetch conveyances from their homes, and about 30-40 wagons had already arrived and were assembled on Cathedral Square awaiting passengers.

As for the certificates, they had been prepared the night before by the Committee for the Defense of the Revolution. It remained only to inscribe the names of the bearers and add the signature of the Chief Commissar. And the latter was prepared to sign these certificates even standing in the middle of the street. That's what happened – I stood next to the wagons and signed the certificates of peasants and workers who were setting out to disarm the bourgeoisie.

When everything was ready, and everyone had taken their place on the wagons, I spoke a few words about the present critical moment for the Revolution, about the importance of simultaneous and decisive actions on the part of the toilers on the local level. And here in Gulai-Polye the peasants and workers were setting an example by their action against the bourgeoisie, an example which was being emulated by several neighbouring regions. The wagons then set out to cover the raion.

Another group of peasants and workers proceeded to confiscate weapons in Gulai-Polye itself from the bourgeoisie and from officers who had arrived here from the Front.

The Committee for the Defense of the Revolution together with the Soviet of Peasants' and Workers' Deputies held a

special meeting at which it was decided to convene in short order an extraordinary raion Congress of Soviets, with the participation of the A-K Group and the Soviet of the Union of Metal and Carpentry Workers of Gulai-Polye.

It was also decided at this impromptu meeting to strengthen links with the A-K Group in order to take joint action, before the Congress of Soviets, to withdraw from the "Public Committees" in the raion the right to make binding decisions of a social character.

This collaborative work of the three revolutionary entities allowed our group to further develop its activity among the oppressed toilers of the villages and to get them used to the idea of a free, libertarian society.

The toilers of the Gulai-Polye raion, without worrying about any repercussions on the part of the central authorities, acted to limit the power of all the Public Committees of the coalition government of socialists with the bourgeoisie. These Committees, the principal function of which had consisted of issuing ordinances and decrees telling people what they could or couldn't do without permission from the government, and what they could or couldn't think without authorization by the future Constituent Assembly. Now they were limited in their rights to the point that they were transformed from legislative bodies into consultative bodies. They were deprived of the right to decide in a definitive way any question of public interest no matter what, without having it approved by a public assembly.

Such an attitude on the part of the toilers towards "rights" and towards the authority of their oppressors and enemies of the Revolution, enemies of everything healthy and creative in it, raised a terrible stir in the ranks of the ruling stratum. The zealous supporters of the idea of coalition with the bourgeoisie against the Revolution began to sound the alarm. However, in spite of the fury and rage they displayed at meetings of the Communal Committees and other local meetings, and in spite

of all the actions taken by them with the help of the central authorities to undermine the position taken by the toilers of Gulai-Polye raion towards them and the power of their government, and in spite of, finally, all the foul tales spread everywhere, either orally or in print, attacking the toilers of the raion in general and the A-K Group in particular, all their efforts came to nought.

The real actions of the authorities in general, including the authorities who called themselves revolutionary, collided with the real demands of the Revolution. These actions stalled the course of the Revolution and encouraged the growth of the Counter-Revolution, which, in the repulsive form of the Kornilov movement, starkly confronted the toiling masses.

The toilers of Gulai-Polye raion, having observed these facts during long months, now recognized that only the anarchist conception of the Revolution was capable of saving the Revolution and carrying it through to fulfillment. That's why, every time the uyezd Public Committee and the uyezd Government Commissar requested from Gulai-Polye weekly reports about the development of revolutionary-social life in the raion, and also the remittance of taxes to be used to spread the propaganda of the Provisional Government, they received the answer that through the Committee for the Defense of the Revolution the whole bourgeois element in the raion had been disarmed and all rights to private property in land, factories, workshops, and other enterprises of the raion had been declared null and void. "Everything must belong to everyone, and not to some clique of idle parasites"... (from the Minutes No. 3, Book 2, Committee for the Defense of the Revolution in Gulai-Polye, 1917).

CHAPTER 13

Struggle with the Counter-Revolution – Going to the villages

Thus the bourgeoisie was disarmed and its weapons were distributed among the revolutionary peasants. The disarmament took place without any blood being spilled.

A Congress of Raion Soviets was convened with the purpose of examining the causes and goals of General Kornilov's movement.

The Congress welcomed the election by the Gulai-Polye Soviet and other organizations of the "Committee for the Defense of the Revolution", as well as all its actions up to the time the Congress was convened. The Congress expressed the conviction that the time for such actions had arrived.

Reviewing the Kornilov attack on Petrograd, which had already been suppressed, the Congress once more emphasized that it considered the dismantling of the External Front a crime because this Front was necessary to defend the Revolution against the exterior enemy. The Congress encouraged all toilers to root out the Kornilov movement in their midst.

The Congress dealt with some other questions, approved the declaration of the abolition of private property in our raion, and discussed the agrarian question.

The A-K Group proposed to the Congress to make its own report on the agrarian question. This report was presented by Comrades Krat and Andrei Semeniuta. It was concerned mainly with practical measures for liquidating the rights of the pomeshchiks and kulaks to ownership of land, especially fabulously large estates which they couldn't possibly work with their own hands. The Group proposed to immediately expropriate the land and to convert the estates into free agrarian communes. The pomeshchiks and kulaks were to be

given an opportunity to be part of these communes. But if they refused to become members of the family of free toilers and wished to work individually for themselves,then they would be assigned a portion of the people's wealth appropriate for their labour power. In this way they would have the means of making a living while working separately from the free agrarian communes of the rest of the toilers.

The Congress summoned representatives of the Gulai-Polye Land Committee and asked them to make a report explaining what this Committee had been doing about the land question. Comrade Krat was a member of the Land Committee. With the approval of the other Committe members he reported what had been undertaken by the Committee in this field, emphasizing that the Committee was in accord with the position just set forth by the A-K Group. He noted that this position had been placed on the agenda of the Raion Congress of Land Committees by the Gulai-Polye representatives and that this Congress had adopted it as the basis for arriving at a solution of the land question.

The Congress of Soviets, with the full participation (as I have already mentioned) of the Soviet of the Trade Union, the Land Committee, and the A-K Group, discussed these two reports with full awareness of its revolutionary duty towards the oppressed toilers, who had only just decided to rid themselves of their oppressors by revolutionary means. The resolution passed by the Congress on this question reads:

"The Gulai-Polye Raion Congress of Toilers firmly condemns the pretensions of the Provisional Government in Petrograd and the Ukrainian Central Rada in Kiev to direct the life of the toilers and invites the local soviets and the whole organized proletarian population to ignore any orders of these governments.

"The people must be in charge of their own lives.The time has finally come to realize this age-old dream. From now on, all the land, the factories, and the workshops must belong

to the toilers.

"The labouring peasantry must be masters of the land, and the workers must be masters of the factories and workshops.

"Before the peasants stands the task – to expel all the pomeshchiks and kulaks who don't want to contribute their own labour from their estates and organize free agrarian communes on these estates, communes composed of volunteer peasants and workers. The Congress recognizes that the initiator of this approach is the A-K Group and charges the Group with carrying it through.

"The Congress hopes that the local Soviets and Land Committees will provide the Group with all the technical means at their disposal for the carrying through of this project."

Then the Congress expressed its conviction that the consolidation of the conquests of the Revolution by the toilers, in the face of the opposition of their enemies, would immediately lead to, not just in our raion but in the whole of Ukraine and Russia, the total expropriation of all collective enterprises so that the labouring population could enjoy the fruits of their labour instead of the bourgeoisie and the State.

As the Congress was winding down, the Committee for the Defense of the Revolution received a bunch of telephonograms[6] from a whole series of raions which had been loyal to the authorities in Alexandrovsk. These messages said agents of the Alexandrovsk Uyezd Public Committee, the Uyezd Soviet, and the government commissar had been trolling the villages and countryside, holding meetings and urging the peasants to boycott the Congress of Soviets in Gulai-Polye. The reason given was that the Congress was deciding questions which no one had the right to decide before the Constituent Assembly convened... . They declared that the Congress in Gulai-Polye, although passing itself off as a peasant congress, was actually

6 In Gulai-Polye at that time personal telephones were virtually unknown and telephone messages were handled much the same way as telegraph messages.

making decisions that would harm the peasants... . That the leaders of the Congress were sworn enemies of the peasants who did not understand the laws of the Revolution which is why they had repudiated the Provisional "Revolutionary" Government (with Kerensky at the top) and the Constituent Assembly (the supreme revolutionary tribunal) ...

I added to these messages a directive received by the Gulai-Polye Public Committee from the Government Uyezd Commissar which demanded the removal of N. Makhno from any organizing activities in Gulai-Polye: he was, it seems, to be brought to trial in connection with the disarming of the pomeshchiks and kulaks.

After listening to these messages, the Congress convoked the executive of the Gulai-Polye Public Committee and asked them to participate in critquing these missives, in particular the demand of the commissar that I be relieved of any organizing duties.

After a storm of indignation directed at the Government commissar and the Government agents who were roaming the countryside, the Congress passed the following resolution:

"The Gulai-Polye Congress of Soviets, as well as the Gulai-Polye Soviet itself, do not recognize, either for themselves or for the toilers who have invested them with full powers, any sanctions, either of the Government Commissar, or the Public Committee of Alexandrovsk; and the anarchist Makhno they consider above all their friend and mentor in revolutionary and organizing activities.

"The former Gulai-Polye Peasants' Union sent the anarchist N. Makhno and six other members to the Gulai-Polye Public Committee to exercise firm control over its work. After the reorganization of the Union into the Peasants' Soviet, these appointments were confirmed. This Congress also supports these appointments and protests against the impertinent interference of the Uyezd Public Committee and the Govern-

ment Commissar in local working class affairs."

This resolution (Book No. 2 in the minutes of the Congress) I sent off to the government commissar Citizen B. K. Mikhno. However this was not the end of the matter. The A-K Group asked the Congress for a recess of two hours during the last sitting of the Congress, after which the Group intended to make a very important report about the current state of affairs. The Congress in fact recessed for three hours, during which the delegates engaged in many private conversations. Meanwhile the members of our Group held a meeting at which myself and Comrade Antonov were charged with presenting a report to the Congress about "the counter-revolution in Alexandrovsk and its uyezd". The Congress session resumed. The report was presented.

I find it inappropriate to recount here the ideas contained in the report, but I wish fervently that those who dismiss the peasants without knowing them could be present at such a meeting where reports are given on behalf of our anarchist groups of peasants and workers. The reaction of the peasants to these reports is quite instructive and gives a good sense of their psychology. Those smug, superior-feeling observers would learn once and for all that revolutionary peasant toilers require no external advice or authorization when it comes to arranging their own independence and their own productive activities in the revolutionary process. It is for us to go to the peasants humbly and try to understand them.

After hearing the report of our Group, the Congress passed the following resolution:

"The Congress of Toilers of Gulai-Polye Raion charges the Gulai-Polye Soviet of Peasants' and Workers Deputies appoints two representatives from the Gulai-Polye A-K Group, Comrades N. Makhno and V. Antonov. These representatives, provided with appropriate official documentation, are charged with meeting with the factory and dock workers of Alexandrovsk with the aim of finding out

their real views on the Soviet of Workers' Deputies elected by them in Alexandrovsk. We, the peasants, need to have a clear understanding of the position of the city workers in relation to Executive Committee of their own Soviet, which is spreading the counter-revolution throughout the rural areas of the uyezd.

"It is only in this way that we, the revolutionary peasantry, can correctly evaluate the relative strengths of the revolutionary forces and the forces of our enemies." (From the minutes of the Congress of Toilers in Gulai-Polye, September 1917).

The Congress then discussed some other questions of current importance and charged the Gulai-Polye Soviet with publishing all its resolutions and distributing them to all the local Soviets. This ended the work of the Congress.

* * * * * * *

This attitude on the part of the revolutionary peasants towards the parasitic land barons, an attitude observed by us, the peasant-anarchists, for a duration of six months and confirmed in clear-cut fashion by the September Congress, still more consolidated the strength of our Group in the raion.

Henceforth the A-K Group attracted more and more attention from all the Soviets and even the Public Committees. But this result was not achieved without growing pains. We expended a lot of effort in order to overcome, internally, resistance to the principle of a well-ordered organization. Our situation in the oppressed villages became firmly established only when the Group had set up a strong organization and when each move of its active members was made with the knowledge of the membership of the group as a whole. Our assignments were as follows:

Soviet of Workers' and Peasants' Deputies: V. Antonov, Sokruta, and Kalinichenko.

Workshop Committees: Petrovsky, Seregin, Mironov, G. Sharovsky, and L. Schneider.

Soviet of the Union of Metal and Carpentry Workers and their Health Insurance Fund: N. Makhno, Seregin, Antonov.

Peasants' Soviet and the Land Committee: A. Marchenko, A. Semeniuta, Prokofii Sharovksy, F. Krat, Isidor Lyutii, Pavel Korostelev, the brothers Makhno[7], Stepan Shepel, and Grigori Sereda.

In this way our group was unified around the goal of bringing our ideas to life. Each of us understood this and conscientiously took responsibility for their own work.

At the same time our group was drawn closer to the mass of toilers and was enabled to acquaint the toilers with the ideas of anarchism in the social sense of the term and of the need for vigilance with respect to the activities of the Provisional Government and the Ukrainian Central Rada and its Secretariat at a time when these bodies were most detrimental to the practical goals of the Revolution.

The toilers of the raion declared openly to all and sundry that they were keeping a close eye on their oppressors and were prepared to take up arms against them.

From the end of August 1917 all the Public Committees of the raion began to protest against various government orders they had received. These protests were first discussed at local meetings. Then delegates were sent to Gulai-Polye to consult with our group, and after this a final decision was arrived at.

However, in spite of the obvious revolutionary consciousness of the toilers, a consciousness which opened the way to full spiritual and material freedom and independence from authority, a freedom which the toilers strived to acquire at whatever cost, with their own blood if necessary, a freedom

7 Savva Makhno (1868-1920) was one of the leading anarchist activists in Gulai-Polye.

which they wished to feel in themselves and around themselves thereby realizing a society without authority – in spite of this consciousness so strongly displayed by the toilers – the principle of the abolition of private property in land, factories, and workshops proclaimed by the Gulai-Polye Committee for the Defense of the Revolution and confirmed by the Raion Congress of Toilers could not be fully realized in practice.

The Provisional Government, backed by Kerensky's allies (the Right S-Rs and the Mensheviks) and controlling the local state apparatus and the troops (which kept apart from the toilers of Gulai-Polye raion and knew nothing of their goals), ended up having the upper hand. The Government impeded the revolutionary impulse of the toilers who, with their demands for full liberty, had gone well beyond the programs of these political parties. The Government would not allow this healthy initiative to be brought to fruition.

It was thus that, temporarily at least, the privileges of the bourgoisie shamefully triumphed over the revolutionary masses.

Those who marched under the banner of socialism and played at being socialists contributed incontestably to this result. The toilers of Gulai-Polye raion, who had boldly tried to seize liberty and happiness, had to content themselves, this time, with not paying to the pomeshchiks the land rent and placing under the control of the Land Committees the land, equipment, and livestock so that the pomeshchiks couldn't sell them.

It was painful to see how all the toilers in the raion suffered with their physical powerlessness in comparison to the strength of their enemies. This powerlessness was quite obvious and the question was posed: where can one find strength? The toilers finally came to the conclusion that they could count only on themselves. They closed ranks, trying to create sufficient force to liberate all the toilers from the baleful tyranny of the State.

CHAPTER 14

Visit to the factory workers of Alexandrovsk

In spite of the reaction which reigned in all the government institutions and in the workers' Soviet of Alexandrovsk towards the toilers of Gulai-Polye raion, the delegates of the Gulai-Polye Soviet and the Congress, namely Comrade Antonov and myself, left for Alexandrovsk with the aim of presenting to the factory workers a report on "the Counter-Revolution in the city and uyezd of Alexandrovsk", because we were convinced that revolutionary Gulai-Polye could have an impact in Alexandrovsk.

The authorities received us with hostility but didn't dare hinder us from making an official tour of all the factories, plants, and workshops so we could let the workers know what the peasants were thinking and what measures they intended to take in their revolutionary work. At the same time we hoped to find out what the workers were thinking and what plans they were making for the future, surrounded as they were by the Counter-Revolution which, in the name of the workers, was extending its activity into the countryside.

The Gulai-Polye Soviet and the Trade Union had promised that if the authorities took it into their heads to arrest us, they would launch a campaign against Alexandrovsk.

When we arrived in Alexandrovsk we first went to the Soviet and asked the executive to suggest the most expeditious way to arrange our tour of workplaces so that we wouldn't skip any place and wouldn't waste our time. In response to questioning from members of the executive as to what we were up to, we showed them our mandates and, after pondering a bit, they suggested an itinerary and stamped our mandates. But after leaving the Soviet we didn't follow their suggestions, but made our way instead to the Federation of Anarchists.

There we picked up a guide and assistant in the person of the anarchist Comrade Nikiforova and all three of us headed out to visit the workplaces.

We presented our mandates to the factory and plant committees and right away they collected all the workers to hear our report from the peasants.

We spent several days visiting workplaces, making reports to the workers about activities being carried on in their name in the villages by the counter-revolution, activities which were being resisted by the peasants. The workers listened to us with rapt attention and passed their own resolutions of protest against the actions of their own Soviet. They thanked us and, through us, all the toilers of Gulai-Polye raion for our visit and for exposing to them these vile machinations which were being carried out in the uyezd by their own Soviet together with other government organizations.

At many of these sessions there appeared members of the Alexandrovsk Soviet and the Public Committee, as well as agents of the Government Commissar and the Military Commissar himself, the S-Rs. Popov. All of these characters spoke out against our reports in an arrogant fashion, acting as if they were incontestably in charge of the situation.

However, they didn't prevail. The workers declared to them: "We don't trust you any more because, letting yourselves be run by the bourgeoisie, you have hidden from us a lot of stuff which is useful to the Revolution. You want us to support the Revolution but you don't want us to develop and broaden it."

On the evening of the third day we had one report left to make at the munitions workshops, formerly the Badovsky plant. We arrived at the gates of these workshops. At our request to the sentry to admit us to the Committee of Military Workshops, the sentry silently locked the gates in front of us. We shouted through the gates that we had come on behalf of the

peasants to make a report to the military workers. The sentry called a member of the Military Committee who declared to us, through the gates, that the Committee knew about us but could not let us in to talk to the soldiers because the Military Commissar, the S-R Popov, had ordered that we were not to be admitted under any circumstances. At this time groups of soldiers began to gather in the courtyard behind the gates. I spoke to them directly: "Comrade soldiers, who's the boss here? Is the Commissar, elected by you to the Public Committee, the boss over you? Or does the Commissar answer to you? It's a disgrace, comrades, that you find yourselves in a situation where you aren't allowed to receive representatives of the peasants – they're your fathers and mothers, your brothers and sisters!"

Cries were heard from the soldiers: "Where's our Committee? Bring them here! The Committee must open the gates and let in the representatives of the peasants!... . Or else we'll let them in ourselves... ."

Five soldiers, bare-headed, ran up and opened the gates. We were let into their dining hall where they bombarded us with sensible questions about Gulai-Polye and the activities there.

A dozen of them surrounded me and said: "We are mostly Left S-Rs and Bolsheviks, there are some anarchists here as well, but we are helpless. If we make the slightest move in a revolutionary sense the Military Commissar will immediately send us to the Front against the Germans and recruit new people to take our places. Help us if you can, Comrade Makhno. We would like to recall all the soldiers' representatives from the Soviet and the Public Committee and replace them with others who are closer to our ideas."

I told them we had been charged by the peasants to carry out a mission. "Since our mission coincides with your revolutionary ideas, you should rejoice at its success and try to contribute to it."

We began our report. The soldiers from the workshops avidly devoured each word, trying to understand everything correctly. They asked questions and openly expressed their joy.

When we invited the soldier-workers to form an organizational connection with the peasants of the uyezd through Gulai-Polye raion and create a common revolutionary front against the Counter-Revolution, a cry was heard from the mass of soldiers: "Against what Counter-Revolution? All power is in the hands of the revolutionaries! Where can the Counter-Revolution arise?" This was none other than Military Commissar Popov, surrounded by his cohorts.

When Comrade Antonov responded to him that it was precisely this "revolutionary power" which was creating the Counter-Revolution, Commissar Popov, the S-R Martinov, and other socialists began to object violently. From this dispute it became clear that the military workshops were under the influence of the S-Rs and S-Ds. But this influence was not, strictly speaking, ideological, but authoritarian-statist. The mass of soldiers were divided into various political groupings of which the Right S-Rs and the Mensheviks (S-Ds) did not form the majority. But, if they expressed a revolutionary opinion even once (the soldiers told me this openly), they risked being sent to the External Front. So they abstained from speaking out and submitted to the tyranny of the statist power of the Right S-Rs and Mensheviks. This domination of the SRs and SDs got me so worked up that I immediately asked the soldiers to recall these socialists from all the institutions and even expel any of them found in the workshops. I promised the soldiers to intervene at the Provincial Military Commissariat to ensure that their rights were not trampled on. At that time the head of the Commissariat was an anarcho-syndicalist, Comrade Grunbaum, a man with a strong revolutionary will and a good administrator. In the worst case scenario they must be prepared to defend their rights by force of arms in the street and they could count on Gulai-

Polye to support them.

My appeal filled the soldiers with enthusiasm. They wanted to kick the SRs and SDs out of the workshops right away. And if they had not been restrained by their revolutionary consciousness of their responsibility for the lives of these people, why they would have torn them in pieces. Actually it was only with great effort that we succeeded in preventing the soldiers from committing an act unworthy of revolutionaries and directed against other revolutionaries. (However the agents of the government and of these "revolutionaries" on July 3-5, 1917 murdered Comrade Asnin in Petrograd at the Durnovo dacha[8], as well as many other revolutionaries and anarchists.)

The soldier-workers of the military workshops passed a resolution in connection with our report about recalling their representatives from the Soviet and the Public Committee if these two organizations were not re-organized by all the workers. They also passed a resolution supporting the revolutionary toilers of Gulai-Polye raion... .

And when we left the workshops the soldiers asked us to tell the peasants that the soldiers would always support them in their struggle for liberty and requested them to send similar reports more often.

It was already late. Exhausted, we grabbed a hasty meal at the home of the comrade workers and returned to our rooms.

During the night the Government and Military Commissars – the pomeshchik Mikhno and the S-D Popov – gathered their forces and ordered the secret arrest of the anarchist Nikiforova because she had accompanied us in our meetings with the workers and didn't enjoy the protection of a mandate from the peasants. The agents of the commissars quickly found her apartment and, seizing her, they took to

8 The Petrograd anarchists had taken over a large villa in the Vyborg district and converted into a "house rest" with facilities for reading and discussion as well as child-care. In June, 1917, the Provisional Government ordered a raid on the villa in which the worker Asnin was killed.

prison in an automobile.

But, unfortunately for the commissars, the workers of Alexandrovsk found out about the Nikiforova's arrest first thing in the morning when they went to work. They immediately elected delegates and sent them to the commissars, empowering them to demand the immediate release of Nikiforova. The commissars avoided the workers' delegates and couldn't be found.

Then the workers of the factories, plants, and workshops abandoned their machines and, accompanied by the wailing of the plant sirens, marched on the Soviet under their banners, singing revolutionary songs.

As the workers were showing their revolutionary solidarity by marching on the Soviet, they encountered the President of the Soviet, the Social Democrat Mochalii and seized him. A delegation, elected on the spot, put the President in a horse-drawn cab and accompanied him to the prison to liberate the anarchist Nikiforova.

When the workers' delegation, President Mochalii, and the anarchist Nikiforova arrived back from the prison at the procession which was marching along Cathedral Street, the workers grabbed Nikiforova and, passing her from hand to hand, bore her in triumph to the Soviet, congratulating her on her release and cursing the Provisional Government and all its agents.

None of the commissars dared show themselves at the tribune of the Soviet. Only the anarchist Nikiforova occupied this tribune and, with her powerful voice, urged the workers to struggle against the Government for the Revolution and for a society free of all authority.

We had finished our reports with an appeal to the workers to do something about the Alexandrovsk Soviet which had gone too far in its anti-revolutionary activities. We knew what kind of organization it was from the behaviour of its agents

in the villages and at congresses. Our reports predicted its fate. The arrogant act of the commissars towards our comrade anarchist was inexcusable both from a political and a tactical point of view and could only hasten the fall of this Soviet of Right S-Rs, Menshevik S-Ds, and Kadets.

The industrial workers were now confronted with the problem of how to re-elect the Soviet in the most expeditious manner. In the course of several days new elections were scheduled. The workers recalled all their former representatives and elected, in most cases, new people.

In this way a new Executive Committee of the Alexandrovsk Soviet was formed.

This new Executive Committee was again composed not of workers interested directly in furthering their class interests, but of people who, while they were workers, were also by conviction very close to the Left S-Rs, and Bolsheviks, and even the anarchists. These newly-elected people divided themselves into fractions and, from the very first day of their entry into the Executive Committee, were guilty of distorting the meaning of Revolution among the working masses and, if it were not for the anarchists, would have ended up doing away with the essence of Revolution altogether.

However, this new Executive of the Alexandrovsk Soviet at least did not support the clearly counter-revolutionary Public Committee of Alexandrovsk uyezd and the Government Commissar in their demands to the Gulai-Polye Public Committee to remove me from organizational work because of my role in disarming the bourgeoisie. Also the new Soviet did not insist on the return of the confiscated weapons.

The new Alexandrovsk Soviet, like all the higher political institutions and administrations, felt the need to give each of its members a portfolio to carry under their arms as if they were going to decide the fate of the Revolution. And they met day after day elaborating rules for their own activities. The

time for such work was propitious. This was the period when the Bolsheviks and Left S-Rs agreed on many points and the question of forming a bloc arose. This question had not yet been posed by the leadership of either party but it was easy to predict a positive outcome.

Comrade Antonov and myself left Alexandrovsk with regret. We would have liked to spend more time with the industrial workers of Alexandrovsk, among whom were many well-known and devoted revolutionaries. They were outstanding members of their class and yet did not belong any political party. The sympathized with the anarchists. We would have liked to stay with them but we didn't have the right. We had begun organizational work among the peasants and we had to see it through. We returned to Gulai-Polye.

Upon our return we called a meeting of all the Gulai-Polye revolutionary, trade union, and social organizations and made a detailed report about our successes in Alexandrovsk. Then we convened a general assembly of the whole working population of Gulai-Polye and made a detailed report about the reception we got from the city workers and their reaction to our report to them about the counter-revolutionary activities going on in Alexandrovsk and its uyezd. We also passed on the message from the soldier-workers of the munition workshops. Our successes among the Alexandrovsk workers invoked general rejoicing among the toiling population.

The revolutionary toilers thirsted for action.

I proposed to the peasants to designate reliable people who would be able to help the Land Committee to proceed immediately to dividing up the land belonging to the churches, the monasteries, and the pomeshchiks, because it was necessary to seed this land before winter or plough it in preparation for spring.

The peasants resolutely set about this work, but when they got out in the field and actually began to divide up the land,

they realized that each peasant would have to keep, for that year at least, the land which he had ploughed and seeded with winter wheat. It was decided that each of these peasants should pay a certain sum to the community in order to maintain the public funds which provided for needs of the community, funds which would receive nothing that year from those peasants who had not been working.

In general the peasants took over the land which it was necessary to seed before winter and shared it out without paying the least attention to threats from government agents. A number of raions and uyezds followed the example of the peasants of Gulai-Polye.

Our A-K Group and members of the Gulai-Polye Soviet sent out literature and agents over a wide area encouraging the peasants to follow our example. We hoped that the local successes of direct revolutionary action by the toilers would resolve the land question in a definitive and just manner before the convocation of the Constituent Assembly. At the same time we hoped also to predetermine the fate of private ownership of factories, plants, and other enterprises, so that the workers, following the example of the peasants, would not remain slaves of the owners of these social enterprises. We hoped they would declare them public property and put them under the direct control of their union plant committees and unions.

This would lead to the commencement of the struggle against the political power of the government (assuming that the anarchist groups in the cities were on the job) and thus the death of the principles of statism itself would become an accomplished fact in the life of the toilers. There would remain only one task: to bury these principles so deeply that they would never be resurrected.

In Gulai-Polye and the surrounding territory public life took on a healthy character, to the great joy of the revolutionary anarchists, peasants, and workers.

CHAPTER 15

The Provincial Soviet makes advances to Gulai-Polye

While Comrade Antonov and myself were in Alexandrovsk, the Executive Committee of the Yekaterinoslav Provincial Soviet of Workers', Peasants', and Soldiers' Deputies began to direct serious attention towards Gulai-Polye. This Committee, politically astute, did not have recourse to repressions as is normally the case with inconsiderate and foolish revolutionary and counter-revolutionary politicians. Instead it resorted to "political wisdom": by-passing the uyezd level, it sent a proposal to the Gulai-Polye Soviet to delegate its own permanent representative to the Provincial Executive Committee of Soviets.

In the course of the discussion on this proposal, the Gulai-Polye Soviet was astonished by the following circumstance: there was already a delegate from Gulai-Polye on the Provincial Executive Committee – elected at the Provincial Congress. However, the Provincial Executive Committee was proposing that we send a second delegate directly from the Gulai-Polye Soviet.

This proposal compelled our Soviet to review its past policies, according to which it had always determined it own role in revolutionary work and rejected the direction of higher bodies as incompatible with its understanding of the essence of revolution. Thus it seemed that our response to the Yekaterinoslav Provincial Soviet had, in principle, already been decided and merely needed to be formalized by means of a meeting and a resolution.

However, after we had referred to our original revolutionary views, we realized that they gave rise to problems in carrying revolutionary work in practice. We needed to form alliances with the industrial workers so that together we could claim

the right to our heritage: the land, the factories, the plants, etc., and so that together we could exercise this right.

Guided by this idea, we found it mandatory to study the proposal of the Provincial Soviet from all points of view and try to understand what importance its acceptance or rejection would have for revolutionary work in Gulai-Polye.

The proposition was submitted to serious discussion. Two questions required clarification: (1) the links generally of the toilers of Gulai-Polye raion with other raions which were also striving to broaden and deepen the revolutionary process; and (2) the possibility that direct representation on the Provincial Soviet would lead to a conflict of ideas in our ranks.

In the end it was clear that the influence of Gulai-Polye raion was widespread in the region, and that Kamishevatsky raion was working energetically with us. Many raions from Berdyansk, Mariupol, Pavlograd, and Bakhmyt uyezds were sending us their delegates to learn our attitude towards the enemies of the revolution: the Provisional Government and the Ukrainian Central Rada; also to find out how be we were struggling to transfer all the land, factories, and workshops under the direct control of the peasant and worker organizations.

Moreover, the toilers of many raions of the mentioned uyezds had, by their actions. They had confirmed their solidarity with our ideas, confirmed that they shared our perspective on the land question and on the necessity of doing away with the rule of the Public Committees. They stood for self-management of social affairs and demanded their right to put their ideas into action.

The Gulai-Polye Soviet and the A-K Group saw in this the fruits of their combined efforts. Under the influence of the idea of unity, the Soviet resolved the question about sending their representative to the Provincial Executive Committee in a positive sense: ***to send a capable, reliable comrade from the Anarchist-Communist Group***.

The Gulai-Revkom and Soviet were located in this building.

The rationale for this positive resolution was given by the members of the Gulai-Polye Soviet – peasants and workers – who were not members of the Group. They considered themselves revolutionaries and sympathized with the anarchists but remained embedded in the working class as excellent defenders of the rights of labour. The resolution could be summarized as follows:

"The toilers of Gulai-Polye raion are totally committed to the expropriation of private property in the means of production and consumption for the benefit of working people. But we are not going to get carried away and do something foolish! We realize that this extraordinarily important question can only be solved successfully if expropriations are applied in several raions simultaneously, or, at the very least, separated by only very short intervals of time. That's why it's necessary that the Soviet, the A-K Group, and the Trade Union, which are all sympathetic to our idea, use their influence to root this idea as firmly as possible in the consciousness of the masses in the raions close to Gulai-Polye, because Gulai-Polye will be needing support from these adjacent raions at the critical moment if the practical implementation of these ideas is to be spread to raions even further from Gulai-Polye.

"As the initiator of this great project, it falls to Gulai-Polye to take a leadership role, which it can fulfill only if when the idea of expropriating personal property is firmly established in its own raion. From this point of view it is very important for the Gulai-Polye Soviet to have direct representation by a capable comrade on the Provincial Executive Committee of the Soviets. The A-K Group and the Union of Metal and

Carpentry Workers do not oppose this; on the contrary, they support it."

Following this reasoning, both the A-K Group and the Trade Union Executive spoke out at meeting of the Gulai-Polye Soviet in favour of the decision to send their own representative to the Provincial Executive of the Soviets.

Since the Soviet insisted on sending a member of our Group, we chose Comrade Lev Schneider, an experienced working class organizer.

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It was a time of troubles. Kerensky threatened the leftists with reaction. Revolutionary anarchists had to be ready either to begin armed struggle against the Provisional Government or to disappear into the underground.

I knew perfectly well that our anarchist movement, because of the absence of a strong organization, was weak in the cities and in the countryside scarcely existed. Consequently, our anarchist group had to operate completely independently, as we had earlier decided, and be ready for anything.

Our Soviet provided Comrade L. Schneider with documents certifying that he was authorized to represent it on the Executive Committee of the Provincial Soviet. The A-K Group gave him instructions about how to conduct himself and about working with the Yekaterinoslav Federation of Anarchists. The Soviet of the Trade Union also empowered him to try to enter into negotiations with the Provincial Industrial Committee which was located in Yekaterinoslav. The purpose of this was to ensure that the foundries of Gulai-Polye received the raw materials they needed in sufficient quantity and in a timely fashion so that work in the plants would not have to stop. Or if it did have to stop, then only in those branches which were least necessary for the population of Gulai-Polye raion.

At the Provincial Executive Committee of Soviets, Comrade Schneider was welcomed with open arms. But ... after one or two meetings of the Committee, and one or two speeches by Comrade Schneider – the attitude of the leaders of the Committee changed drastically. His position became difficult. Some members of the Committee raised the question of denying him the right to vote on decisions, leaving him with only a consultative role. Lev Schneider responded that he had never had the right to take part in the decisions of the Provincial Executive Committee of Soviets because the Gulai-Polye Soviet had not authorized him to do so. He had been delegated to the Committee only to keep informed of all new measures taken by the Committee in the revolutionary domain, and to acquaint the representatives of the toilers from other parts of the province with what was being accomplished by the toilers of Gulai-Polye. In this way he hoped it would be possible to coordinate the self-activity of the toilers of the various uyezds or raions so as to fill in any gaps in a coordinated way.

After this frank declaration by Schneider of the motives which had brought him to the Provincial Executive Committee of Soviets from the Gulai-Polye Soviet, numerous members of the Committee requested that an item be added to agenda demanding the complete exclusion of the representative of Gulai-Polye.

However, the times were such that to exclude the representative from Gulai-Polye would have provoked a boycott of the Provincial Executive by Gulai-Polye and a number of revolutionary-minded raions adjacent to it. This would have demonstrated to the toiling masses of the whole province, and even well beyond its boundaries, that the Yekaterinoslav Provincial Executive was trailing the masses when it came to revolutionary action. A boycott at such a high-stress point in the Revolution would create serious problems, at least for politicians.

The Provincial Executive understood this very well and, grudgingly, allowed the representative of Gulai-Polye to remain in its ranks, assigning him to a place in one of its sections. He ended up in the industrial section, if I am not mistaken.

Each week our representative came back to Gulai-Polye to make reports to the Soviet, the Trade Union, and the A-K Group. His reports were discussed. His strength renewed, he headed back to Yekaterinoslav for another week.

Through his mediation the Soviet of the Trade Union concluded an agreement with the Provincial Industrial Committee and began to receive vital raw materials for its plants.

The Raion Congress of Land Committees designated a number of properties of pomeshchiks to be turned into agrarian communes with the help of volunteers.

The toiling peasantry and workers, made up of people with the appropriate skills – often extended families or groups of neighbours – organized themselves into free agrarian communes ranging in size from 50 to 200 people. They had joy on their faces as they discussed among themselves what they must do before spring, what kind of wheat they should sow so as to give the best harvest and, of course, help the Revolution, on condition that the weather was good, not too dry, with the rain necessary for our black earth at the right time in the spring and first two months of summer.

"Sowing all the land with a good grain, followed by an abundant harvest, will allow us to overcome the devastations of war and support the forces of the Revolution as they work in our best interests," said the peasants.

And when the anarchists put this question to them: "What about the Provisional Government in Petrograd and the Central Rada in Kiev? They are the direct enemies of this Revolution which you are striving to support." The answer was always the same, delivered with revolutionary emotion:

"But we are organizing ourselves precisely to overthrow the Provisional Government and not allow the Central Rada to triumph. We hope that by the time spring rolls around we will have done with all governments."

And sometimes we asked: "Who's going to do this – you?"

"We, the peasants and workers. You went to Alexandrovsk and were able to see that the workers want to live, like us, free and independent of any kind of rulers over our heads."

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In September, during our organizing work among the peasants and workers, the Government Commissar, the pomeshchik Mikhno, sent to Gulai-Polye an official charged with conducting an investigation of me and the other peasants and workers who had disarmed the bourgeoisie of the raion.

This official set up shop in the office of the Militia and told the Militia to summon all these peasants and workers, including myself, so he could interrogate them one at a time.

But, unhappily for the Commissar and his underling, the Gulai-Polye Militia did not have a policing function – they had been reduced to errand boys. The Militia warned me about this at the Committee for the Defense of the Revolution and I went in person to see this official and ordered him to gather his papers together and follow me to the Committee.

There I sat him on a chair and asked him to explain as calmly as possible the reason for his presence in Gulai-Polye. He tried his best to give me explanations in a calm manner but, for reasons I can't imagine, he didn't manage at all: his lips trembled, his teeth clattered, he face alternated between red and white, and his eyes were fixed on the floor.

Then I asked him to compose himself and write down what I was going to dictate to him. And when he, holding his pen with great difficulty, had written down what I said, I gave him 20 minutes to get out of Gulai-Polye and two hours to leave the

borders of the raion. And the official indeed left very quickly, astonishing the Committee and myself with his speed, as he returned to his boss in Alexandrovsk.

After this Gulai-Polye no longer received any external orders, nor any special envoys from Alexandrovsk.

CHAPTER 16

October coup d'état in Russia

Repercussions of the October coup d'état – in Petrograd and Moscow, and then in the whole of Russia – reached us in Ukraine only at the end of November and the beginning of December, 1917.

Up until December 1917 the Ukrainian toilers, both urban and rural, knew of the October coup d'état only through the manifestoes of the All-Russian Executive Committee of Soviets, the Soviet of People's Commissars, and revolutionary parties and groups. Two parties in particular were prominent: the Bolsheviks and the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries. For these two parties knew how to benefit from this period in the Russian Revolution to attain their goals. This was a vast uprising of workers, soldiers, and peasants against the Provisional Government, against its disgraceful, but feeble, attacks against the Revolution. The foundations of this uprising had been laid by all the revolutionary groups which had found a place in the great current that was the Russian Revolution.

But these two parties – the one, well-organized; the other, submissively following the crafty Lenin – knew how and when to approach the revolutionary masses, enticing them with their lying slogan: "All Power to the Soviets" and congratulating the masses for their slogan "The Land to the Peasants, the Factories to the Workers". These parties took over the Revolution and, having at their disposal an abundance of paper and printing presses, they papered town and country with their manifestoes, declarations, and programs.

The anarchists played an outstanding role in this insurrection in Petrograd, Moscow, and a series of other industrial centres. They were in the vanguard of the sailors, soldiers, and workers. But, being disorganized, they could not compete in influence with these two political parties, forming a bloc

under the direction of the crafty Lenin. They knew exactly what they had to do during these days and months and what sort of forces and energy were required. Their voice was heard throughout the country loud and clear, echoing the age-old aspirations of the labouring masses: the conquest of the land, bread, and freedom.

Meanwhile the anarchists, totally uncoordinated, were not able even to show the masses the basic hypocrisy of these two political parties, constructing their own rule over the Revolution while spouting slogans which were anti-statist in essence, quite alien to their authoritarian ideals.

The toiling masses, during the period when the Provisional Government and its direct agents, the Right S-Rs and Kadets, were carrying out counter-revolutionary acts, saw the Bolsheviks and Left S-Rs as champions of the goals of labour. That they were full of political cunning the masses did not notice. Only the anarcho-communists and anarcho-syndicalists would have been able to jolt the masses into taking a closer look at these parties. But, following their old tradition, the anarchists before the Revolution did not bother to unite their different groups into a powerful organization. And once the Revolution had begun, they were too busy, either among the workers or in their newspaper offices to think seriously about their lack of self-discipline and the necessity of creating an organization which would allow them to influence the course of events in the country.

It's true that some time after the Revolution began anarchist federations and confederations sprang up. But the October events showed that they had not been able to cope with events. It would seem that perceptive anarcho-communists and anarcho-syndicalists should immediately set about re-evaluating the form of their organizations, coming up with something more stable and more in tune with the momentum of the Revolution.

Alas! This didn't happen! And because of this (and a bunch of other reasons as well) the anarchist movement, so lively and full of revolutionary enthusiasm, found itself trailing events and even, at times, completely shunted to the sidelines, unable to follow an independent path and enrich the Revolution with its ideas and tactics.

Thus, the October revolutionary events, events which cleared the way for the Second Great Russian Revolution, really began to make themselves felt in Ukraine only in December 1917.

During the period from October to December, in the cities and villages of Ukraine took place the transformation of the Public Committes (of these territorial units) into Zemstvo Boards. Now it's true that participaton of the toilers in this reorganization was minimal and purely formal. In many raions the representatives of the peasants on the Public Committees were dropped fom the Zemstvo Boards. In many places the Public Committee was simply re-named the Zemstvo Board without undergoing any change in its structure. But officially the whole country was divided up into territorial units under Zemstvo Boards.

Part of the urban proletarian had gradually taken on a passive, wait-and-see attitude.

The peasants found the moment auspicious for overthrowing the ruling powers and taking their destiny into their own hands. The peasants of Zaporozhe and Preazov[9] followed the October coup with great interest as it spread across central Russia in the form of armed attacks against the adherents of Kerensky's rule. They saw the beginning of what they had been attempting themselves in their villages in August and September. That's why the peasants welcomed the coup and tried to promote it in their own areas. Any other motives tending to bring together the peasants and that part of the workers who rejected passivity and supported the coup did

9 Makhno is not referring to administrative units here, rather to the region of Left Bank Ukraine north of the Sea of Azov and to the great bend of the Dnieper.

not exist. Thus revolutionary Ukrainian toilers of both town and country reacted joyfully to the October coup as they encountered it through manifestos and newspapers. However, the Ukrainian revolutionary toilers were not enthused by the fact the Bolsheviks and Left S-Rs were now in power. The class-conscious peasants and workers saw in this a new phase of intervention by the central authorities in the revolutionary creativity of the toilers at the local level, and consequently a new war between central power and the people. As for the mass of Ukrainian toilers, the peasants of the downtrodden villages in particular, they saw in this new revolutionary socialist government only a government like all governments, which they only had occasion to notice when it despoiled them with its various taxes, when it conscripted soldiers, or intervened with other acts of violence in their arduous lives. One would often hear the peasants express their true opinion of the pre-revolutionary and revolutionary authorities. They seemed to be joking, but they were actually speaking seriously from a background of suffering and hatred when they said that after they had driven the fool Nicholas Romanov from power, Kerensky had then played the fool. Now that he had been chased, "Who will now play the fool at our expense?"

"Lord Lenin," said some.

Others said, "Without the 'fool' we couldn't manage." (By the word 'fool' they always meant the government.)

"Cities only exist for this – their idea, their system is bad. They bring into existence this 'fool'," said the peasants.

In reality, the crafty Lenin correctly understood the city. He placed in the position of "fool" a group of people, under thebanner of the dicatorship of the proletariat, who got it into their heads that they knew what they were doing, but who only wanted power for its own sake so they could impose their will on other people and in fact on the whole human race.

The crafty Lenin raised the role of "fool" to heights previously

unknown and thus attracted not only members of the political party closest to his own in their revolutionary activity and historical militancy – the Left SRs who became his half-convinced disciples – but also some of the anarchists. It's true, these offspring of the old party of Socialist-Revolutionaries – the Left SRs – after 7 or 8 months as Lenin's lackies came to their senses and went into opposition against Lenin even to the point of taking up arms against him. But this by no means changes our evaluation of them mentioned above.

CHAPTER 17

Elections to the Constituent Assembly – our attitude towards the party strife

Being hostile to the very concept of a Constituent Assembly, our Group was naturally hostile to the election of its delegates.

Influenced by the agitational work of our group, the toiling population of the raion was, on the whole, also hostile to the idea of the Constituent Assembly. However, many of them took part in the elections. This is explained by the fact that the socialist parties – the Left and Right S-Rs, Bolsheviks, and Mensheviks – as well as the powerful Kadet Party – conducted a furious campaign throughout the country on behalf of their lists of candidates. Under the influence of this propaganda, the population of the country divided up into numerous groups, thereby completely destroying its unity and even found itself divided on the question of socialization of the land. This was playing into the hands of the Kadets and Mensheviks who at that time stood for making the peasants buy back their land.

Our Group, after studying the activities of all the abovementioned parties, activities which threatened to destroy the unity of the toilers, favoured the S-Rs and Bolsheviks over the Kadets and Mensheviks. As a result we refrained from actively pursuing a boycott of the elections at that time. We recommended to those members who wanted to take part in the meetings organized by the political parties to advise the toilers that if any of them had faith in the Constituent Assembly and wished to participate in the election of delegates to it, they should vote for the Socialist-Revolutionaries (the Left and Right SRs put forward one list – No. 3) or for the Bolsheviks (No. 9).

Although the elections in Ukraine had numerous lists of can-

didates, only three were of interest to the toilers: No. 3 – the S-Rs; No. 5 – the "Ukrainian list", i.e. a mishmash of socialist-chauvinists and nationalists; and No. 9 – the Bolsheviks. The lists of S-Rs and Bolsheviks enjoyed enormous success in areas where the toiling population participated fully in the electoral campaign. No. 5, the "Ukrainian" list, had less success in Left-Bank Ukraine than either No. 3 or No. 9.

The success of the left-wing socialist parties in the elections can be explained, on the one hand, by the fact that the Ukrainian labouring population, not deformed by the politics of the nationalists, preserved its inherent revolutionary spirit, and voted for revolutionary parties. On the other hand, there was the reality that the idea of Ukrainian liberation was based on bourgeois-nationalist self-determination, rather than the autonomy of working people. This idea of the bourgeoisie, anachronistic in the twentieth century, was resuscitated by irresponsible people who even stuck socialist labels on themselves and tried to "talk socialist". But this didn't change the essence of the matter: the question of "Ukrainian liberation" remained locked into a chauvinist framework. The heads of this "movement" were a really ill-assorted bunch, with the exception of two or three people who also eventually sold out to German militarism and ended up marching against the Revolution. Often the most responsible posts were filled with people who could speak Ukrainian but really had no business being in the ranks of a movement which liberatory aspirations.

The spirit of the "Ukrainian Liberation Movement" was bourgeois and chauvinist through and through. Its leaders behaved reprehensibly towards the toilers who had set out by direct action to win liberty, the right to independence, and the construction of a free society. As a result the idea of a "Ukrainian Liberation Movement" aroused the hatred of the Ukrainian revolutionary toilers. They saw through it from the beginning and moved against it, showing no pity to anything touched by it. After two or three months of active

struggle against the Ukrainian nationalist movement, the Great Russian Revolution began and the toilers could see that they were right to struggle against the nationalists so quickly and with such intensity.

I don't really want to take up any more space in this memoir dissecting the Ukrainian Liberation Movement, which caused so much harm to the Revolution. I want to move on to reporting on the effect of the October coup after its triumph in Petrograd and Moscow. It exerted an influence almost immediately on the revolutionary toilers of Zaporozhye and Preazov, in particular. This included the following raions which were linked ideologically with the Gulai-Polye Soviet and looked to it for guidance in the struggle against the government and the widening and deepening of the revolutionary process: Aleksandrovsk, Melitopol, Berdyansk, Mariupol, Bakhmyt, and Pavlograd.

Having followed closely the everyday goings on in these raions, I can confirm that in November and December the triumph of the coup in Russia was greeted by the Ukrainian toilers with great joy. They in no way changed their own local activities because they recognized that the Coup was based on the ideas of the real Revolution, which came from the awakening of the oppressed villages and enslaved cities.

Up until October, Gulai-Polye raion had tried to make its mark on the Revolution in a deep and deliberate manner – completely devoid of any statist concepts. Then at the end of November 1917 four official governments were organized in Yekaterinoslav, each pretending to rule the revolutionary masses of the whole province. They proceeded to bad-mouth each other and then started to fight among themselves, dragging the toilers into the fray. Gulai-Polye raion completely avoided taking sides in these struggles in which one government or the other temporarily triumphed.

At the beginning of December the bloc of Bolsheviks and Left S-Rs got the upper hand in Yekaterinoslav. Gulai-Polye raion

recognized these parties as revolutionary and immediately came up with an analysis their revolutionary value.

The toilers said: "We consider the Bolsheviks and Left S-Rs to be revolutionary because of their activities during the Revolution. We congratulate them as staunch militants. But we don't trust them in power. They triumphed on our backs over the bourgeoisie which tried to kill the Revolution with the support of right-wing socialist groupings. And then the Bolsheviks and Left S-Rs set up their own government which smells just the same as any other government, the likes of which have been stifling us for centuries. And it doesn't look like this new government is in any hurry to establish local self-management for the toilers so they won't be at the mercy of the bosses.

"Everywhere commissariats are being established. And these commissariats have a police-like character rather than being egalitarian institutions composed of comrades seeking to explain to us the best way to organize ourselves so that we will be independent and not have to listen to the bosses who up to now have lived on our backs and done us nothing but harm.

"Since this revolutionary government shows no egalitarian tendencies, since on the contrary it is consolidating police-like institutions, then in the future we can expect, instead of advice, only the peremptory orders of the bosses. Anyone thinking independently and acting contrary to the orders received will be faced with death or deprived of their freedom, which we value above all else."

The toilers offered this analysis which, although vague in details, expressed the truth that by means of their sacrifices events had taken place in which one evil system was overthrown and another installed in its place under various pretexts.

The fact that the toiling masses of Ukraine understood the

aspirations of the various political parties allowed them to reject the right-wing socialists and ally themselves with those groups which they saw moving in the same direction. In the vanguard they saw the Bolsheviks, Left S-Rs, and anarchists. But the first two socialist groupings knew what they needed to do at the given moment; moreover they had concluded an alliance which meant that they acted perfectly in unison. This made them stand out in the eyes of the toilers who referred to them under one name – "Bolsheviks" – a name under which all the revolutionaries were merged, including the anarchists.

The masses of toilers looked at this complex of groupings standing in their vanguard and said: "We welcome these revolutionaries, but we don't have enough information to say they won't end up fighting among themselves for the right to take power over us and subject us entirely to their will. This tendency certainly exists among them which could lead them to unleash a new war while we, the toilers, with our right to autonomous action on behalf of revolutionary interests, are relegated to the sidelines and forced to submit to the egotistical, criminal interests of parties."

This forced the revolutionary toilers of Gulai-Polye to be even more vigilant than usual.

CHAPTER 18

Provincial Congress

Before the December Provincial Congress of Soviets of Peasants', Workers', and Soldiers' Deputies, an assembly of the Soviet of Gulai-Polye raion was organized. All the delegates present at this assembly insisted that our representatives at the Provincial Congress be prepared not to fall under the influence of the agents of political parties. Our representatives were to declare, without hesitating, that they had come to the Congress, not in order to listen to reports of government agents and to obey them, but to read their own reports about what the toilers were doing locally and why they were doing it. And they were to explain why, in the future, they would not be following orders imposed from above.

The delegates which we elected to the Provincial Congress were to make explicit the idea which formed the basis of our actions, namely that at this moment in the Revolution the problem of first importance for all toilers was moving forward to full liberation from the power of the two authorities which oppressed us – private Capital and the State.

The State as political power, as the organization of society, cannot exist without oppression, pillage, and murder; it must die under the blows of the revolutionary toilers who are advancing passionately and in unity towards a new free society.

The agenda of the Provincial Congress was known to us. There was nothing new in it for our raion, for we had already instituted the measures mentioned there some time ago. Our delegates were to note this fact to the peasant and worker delegates from other raions. Our position in practice flowed naturally from our ideas. We needed to make this widely known so that the toilers of the whole country would understand what we were doing.

After the assembly had laid out these guidelines, there were nominations of candidates. Elected were N. Makhno and Mironov.

The assembly then expressed its thanks to its representatives for accepting its mandates, saying: "You have been elected, Comrades, with the full consent of those who sent us here. In your persons we are sending to the Provincial Congress the first among equals of the revolutionary toilers of Gulai-Polye raion.

"We have no doubt that you will fulfill with distinction your mission to the Provincial Congress. The instructions we are giving you don't go into details. The fact that we are giving you instructions at all is just our traditional way of doing things. It helps to unite us on the road to more revolutionary conquests."

Such instructions and such parting words were customary in Gulai-Polye when delegates were elected to the uyezd and provincial congresses.

If I dwell on this election of representatives, it is because it took place at a time when the Left Bloc had taken power over the inhabitants of the city of Yekaterinoslav and its environs. Gradually they concentrated in their own hands, to their own benefit, all the popular conquests of the Revolution. They were trying to deform the Revolution itself.

The toilers of Gulai-Polye raion were well aware that the December Provincial Congress would be dominated by agents of the Left Bloc, who from time to time would let slip their state-power aspirations. That's why the peasants and workers of Gulai-Polye frequently spoke at their own meetings about the necessity to use caution and not rely on the bloc of revolutionary parties. There was a certain odour about them which aroused vigilance. Gulai-Polye warned the toilers of other regions as well.

On the way to Yekaterinoslav, our train was derailed so we

arrived a day late. However, we didn't miss the opening of the Congress. The delegates were all there, but the Congress had not yet started. Among the organizers of the Congress one sensed a certain malaise, a certain anxiety.

As I mentioned earlier, there existed at that moment in Yekaterinoslav four or five independent municipal administrations: (1) the one left over from the Kerensky regime; (2) the Ukrainian one claiming allegiance to the Central Rada; (3) a group of neutral citizens; (4) a unique administration of sailors from Kronstadt who were on their way by train to fight Kaledin and had stopped in Yekaterinoslav for a rest; (5) the administration of Soviet of Workers', Peasants' and Soldiers' Deputies. At the head of the latter at that time stood the anarcho-syndicalist Comrade Grunbaum, a very tactful man with an iron revolutionary will; unfortunately, at that period he was working for the Bolshevik-Left SR Bloc. Grunbaum's authority was dominant, at least in his negotiations with the commanders of the "Ukrainian" units put together from the former Preobrazhensky, Pavlovsky, and Semenovsky regiments (which had just arrived from Petrograd and were stationed in Yekaterinoslav). If Grunbaum had not been conducting these negotiations himself, the Bolshevik leaders – Kviring, Gopner, and Epstein, and also the Left SR Popov and others, would not have been able to get anywhere and would have been driven out of Yekaterinoslav.

The times were such that everything depended upon the force of arms. That force was concentrated in the "Ukrainian" troops and units made up of workers and other inhabitants of the city. Comrade Grunbaum was able to convince the Left Bloc high command to supply troops to support the Soviet which thereby became strong enough to convene the Provincial Congress.

It was typical that while things were dicey the Bolsheviks and Left-SR faded into the background, letting Comrade Grunbaum front for them, and, once things had settled down

a bit, they came to the forefront again and took charge of the Provincial Congress.

The Congress finally got going after lunch. On the next day I took the floor with my report from Gulai-Polye. In passing, I took a shot at the Ukrainian nationalists for their baseless actions in the name of their provincial "Peasants' Union", pointing out to the Congress that there were a number of raions where the peasantry did not recognize the politics of this "Union".

My speech raised the ire of the nationalists. Seven of them protested to the Congress, saying that the Congress was convened on an illegal basis. They said that raions and uyezds should not be sending their peasant and worker representatives to this Congress – the only legal delegates were those elected at uyezd congresses. They demanded that the delegates from Gulai-Polye not be allowed to speak at the Congress, but be present only as observers.

The peasant delegates, also the Bolshevik leaders Kviring and Epstein, spoke against this demand by the Ukrainian nationalists. The Congress voted it down.

Then the nationalists demonstratively got up and left the meeting hall. They were followed by their supporters, delegates from the soldiers.

The Congress took a break for three or four hours. It turned out that the "Ukrainian Provincial Revolutionary Council" had held an emergency meeting on the question: whether or not to dissolve the Congress and take up arms against the Soviet. At this meeting, the chair of the "Revolutionary Council", Dr. Feldman, noted that their strength might not be sufficient and they could well be beaten.

The Congress was troubled by the notion that at any minute blood could be flowing in the streets of Yekaterinoslav. So the Congress sent its own people to the soldiers' barracks – to clarify their attitude towards the Congress. Comrade

Grunbaum, supported by the Yekaterinoslav Federation of Anarchists, again played a key role in countering the nationalists. The anarchist sailors from Kronstadt also supported the delegates of the Congress on this day by speaking before the regiments, and also before the workers in the factories.

At that time in Yekaterinoslav was stationed one regiment of the Cavaliers of St. George. This regiment had always hissed the orators sent to them from the Bolsheviks. The Congress sent me and Comrade L. Azersk to address this regiment in their barracks. We were going to try to get them to pass a resolution about the Ukrainian nationalists who were trying to disrupt the Congress and also to discuss a few essential points with a view to joint action.

I didn't want to be hissed. During nine months of revolution I had spoken to many audiences and had never been hissed. Now the Bolsheviks impressed on me that I was going to be hissed. I was apprehensive but I considered it inappropriate to refuse to carry out this mission for the Congress. We set out. We got in a cab. We arrived at the regiment and found the regimental committee. We met the chairman and presented our mandate from the Congress.

The chairman of the regiment read our mandate and, politely offering us chairs, left to gather the soldiers for a meeting.

After 15 or 20 minutes he came back and told us that everybody had been assembled.

At the door of the committee office we were met by two comrade anarchists – sailors from Kronstadt – and the four of us went to meet the soldiers.

At the meeting we basically argued with the officers, causing one of them to break down weeping and rip off his epaulets, and we got the regiment to pass its own resolution, which declared that "the regiment of the Cavaliers of St. George would defend by force of arms against any attack on the Provincial Congress of Peasants and Workers which started

its work on December 2, 1917."

Analogous resolutions were passed by other regiments and squadrons.

This result was unexpected not so much by the Congress as by the Bolsheviks. All the delegates of the Congress were glad that the regular troops were on their side.

The Congress took up its work again and was finished in three days.

It was characteristic of this Congress that all the decisions set out in its resolutions had already been put into practice in Gulai-Polye raion for three or four months. Only one clause was new to us because we had attached little importance to it: the right of local soviets to a subsidy from the state. I must admit that the Bolsheviks and the Left SRs caught a lot of people with this bait. For Gulai-Polye raion this innovation was unacceptable because it based its own work on anti-statist ideas and tried to be independent of central authorities who tried to control everything.

CHAPTER 19

Counter-Revolution of the Ukrainian Central Rada

At the end of the Congress, the delegates dispersed to their homes. We, Comrade Mironov and I, went to the Anarchist Federation with the intention of finding some good propagandists we could take back with us to the countryside. The Federation was in a better state than when I visited it in August while attending the Provincial Congress of Peasants and Workers. At that time I visited its various sections (the club, etc.). The Federation was still rather weak – it was barely able to tend to the city and its adjacent settlements – Amur, Nizhne-Dneprovsk, and Kaidaki. And yet the Federation was rich in armaments: carbines, rifles, and cartridges. In view of the unusual situation holding sway in the city, the Bolshevik - Left-SR authorities had freely issued weapons to the Yekaterinoslav Federation of Anarchists, without any control whatsoever.

The Bloc saw the Federation of Anarchists as true revolutionaries who spurned the Ukrainian nationalists, backed up as they were by the bourgeoisie and generally in the camp of the Counter-Revolution. The Bloc used the enthusiasm, firm belief, and devotion to the Revolution of the Yekaterinoslav anarchists in every serious revolutionary crisis.

Having these weapons at its disposal, the Federation issued several boxes of rifles to us for the Gulai-Polye A-K Group. We loaded these weapons on the train and travelled back to Gulai-Polye.

In Gulai-Polye we made a series of reports about the Congress and all the obstacles which stood in its way. Subsequently we made similar reports in other villages and settlements.

From this time Gulai-Polye raion began to arm itself in earnest and exercise vigilance towards the new revolutionary

masters. The notion that these new masters – the Bolsheviks and the Left S-Rs – would also hinder the creative development of free thought and action by the toilers of the oppressed villages little by little began to be confirmed even in the minds of those toilers who wanted to believe in the Left Bloc.

The peasants and workers learned from their delegates that the Bolshevik Epstein stated at the Congress: "The urban proletariat has come to power and one must hope that it will create its own state – a Proletarian State. We, the Bolsheviks, will devote all our strength to helping it create such a State, because this is the only way the proletariat will achieve the happiness it seeks."

The toilers of Gulai-Polye interpreted these words as saying that the Bolshevik Party, abandoning all scruples, would build its own "proletarian" State at the expense of the peasants. They began anxiously to follow the course of events in the cities.

In the villages, the peasants began to teach each other how to handle rifle.

"Our enemies, the authorities," they said, "are armed, and if they decide to deprive us of our right to an independent existence and the right to create new social structures, then they will launch an attack on us. Consequently, we must be prepared to reply in kind."

So the peasants prepared. In Gulai-Polye itself there were people from the poor peasantry who had received serious military training. They took young people out into the fields and taught them shooting, manoeuvres, etc.

Among those who knew how to handle weapons and were always ready to share this knowledge with others, one stood out especially – Yakov Domashenko. He inspired both young and old and stuck with the peasants till the very end. When armed struggle broke out, he was several times wounded in battle, fighting with the peasants for Bread and Liberty.

Events were developing rapidly.

Every day we heard rumours that the Ukrainian Central Rada could not come to an agreement with the Left Bloc (over who would be in charge) and, dragging the toiling masses into the fray, they were going to embark on a bloody struggle against the Bloc.

In Gulai-Polye and its raion more and more often appeared dozens of agents of the Central Rada, who preached "perpetual war with the katzaps".

The inhabitants of the raion became even more anxious.

Representative from the villages and hamlets of the raion daily appeared in Gulai-Polye at the office of the A-K Group in the building of the Soviet of Workers' and Peasants' Deputies. They consulted with the anarchists and with the Soviet about what to prepare for in the near future, what they needed to do to preserve their right to land, bread, and liberty which might by curtailed by the programs of one or other government.

The Gulai-Polye A-K Group equipped two of its members – N. Makhno and Antonov – so they could travel round the whole raion and share with the population the opinion of our group about what was troubling them.

Simultaneously, the Group pressured the Soviet (through our members N. Makhno, Sokruta, Kalinichenko, Antonov, Seregin, and Krat) to send their members from outlying districts back home to find out the mood of the inhabitants. They were also to inform people about what was happening at the Soviet and what the raion should do in case the stories about the Counter-Revolution were confirmed.

The reciprocal respect and trust between the anarchist-communists and the toiling population of the raion became stronger and broader.

In my capacity as chairperson of the Gulai-Polye Soviet I was empowered to do whatever was necessary to clarify the

difficult situation of the revolution. So I sent two members of the Soviet to Odessa and Kiev (places where the troops of the Central Rada and the Left Bloc were clashing). When they returned and reported on what was happening, we immediately convened a Congress of Soviets.

At this Congress of the Soviets of Gulai-Polye rayon we examined all the facts about the activities of the Central Rada and the Left Bloc. It was clear that the Central Rada, although lead by socialist-revolutionaries and social democrats, had as its goal not only driving the "katzaps" out of "Motherland Ukraine", but also wiping out all every last trace of the Social Revolution.

The Congress passed the following resolution: Death to the Central Rada.

(This resolution of the Congress was rigorously put into practice.)

Several days after this, when the delegates had dispersed to their homes, the Soviet received a telegram from Alexandrovsk announcing that units of the Central Rada had occupied the city in order to secure the Kichkass Bridge for the trains which were transporting Cossack troops from the external front to join General Kaledin on the Don.

When this telegram was received and understood the whole population of the raion, including the young and old, were on their feet.

I immediately received telephone messages and letters from all the villages of Gulai-Polye raion. Most of these messages were brief, but clearly revolutionary. They expressed the readiness of the population to empower me to handle this crisis with the assistance of the best members of the A-K Group who had done such a good job organizing the peasants.

The sincere and absolute confidence which the peasantry demonstrated towards me I found worrisome. (I say peas-

antry, not mentioning the workers because in Gulai-Polye raion the chief role in the Revolution was played by the peasants; the workers at that time mostly took a wait-and-see position vis-a-vis the Revolution.) I had been working like crazy, never taking any rests, but never felt tired. But the trust of the peasants worried me – I feared setting out on the path of war.

Only a clear awareness that revolutionary work must be devoid of any sentimentality (which had infected my comrades) sustained me and I thrust any anxiety from my thoughts.

I posed the following question to myself and to my comrades of the A-K Group: if I am an adherent of revolutionary anarchism, would it not be a great crime to limit myself in this time of great popular events to a secondary role? Would this not require me to trail after other groups and parties which would probably be hostile to our own views? An anarchist revolutionary must be in the vanguard of the fighting masses in order to win them over to the real struggle of Labour with Capital, not sparing oneself in the process.

I recall what I said at the meeting of our Group:

"It's time to put an end to meetings. The times demand action. This remark really isn't applicable to our group but we should keep it in mind.

"Sixty to seventy percent of those comrades who call themselves anarchists are diverting themselves by seizing the gentry's' fancy homes in the cities and nothing gets done among the peasantry. Their way is the wrong way. They can't influence the course of events sitting in those mansions. It's sad, but that's the way it is! Our group will have to work even harder among the peasants. Any day now the haidamaks of the Central Rada will descend on our region. These brutes bear, at the tips of their bayonets, the death of the Revolution and life of its enemies.

"Our Group must form the vanguard of the struggle with

these hirelings of the Counter-Revolution and lead against them the all toiling population of the raion...

"So, comrades, let's get ready: some of you for local actions, others for the Congress which our Soviet has called for the day after tomorrow.

"We must prove ourselves worthy of the trust the toilers of our raion have in us. And we can only do this by dedicating ourselves to their struggle for freedom and independence."

The Group knew what it had to do at such a moment. Tirelessly, in the course of several months of revolution, it had moved itself and moved the peasantry in the same direction. And I would never have dared to speak about it if my opinion had not been requested on this question.

We prepared ourselves. A day later the delegates from the peasants arrived at the Congress.

At the Congress I decline the office of chairperson offered to me and took the floor with a report on behalf of the Gulai-Polye Soviet and the A-K Group. The Congress discussed my report thoroughly and resolved as follows: to put in order our weak forces, where they existed; and where they did not exist, to organize them immediately. And at the first summons from the Gulai-Polye Soviet to muster in Gulai-Polye or some other assembly point indicated by Gulai-Polye.

This was at the end of December 1917.

CHAPTER 20

With the Left Bloc against the Counter-Revolution

On December 31 1917 I was doing organizational work in the village of Pologui when I received an accurate report that a battle was going on in Alexandrovsk between detachments of the Red Guard group of Bogdanov and some haidamak units of the Central Rada.

At such a moment it was impossible to remain on the sideline as a neutral observer. The population was clearly hostile towards the Central Rada, whose agents were combing the countryside, hunting down revolutionaries, and treating them as "traitors...of Mother Ukraine" and defenders of the "katzaps", whom it considered necessary to exterminate as mortal enemies of the Ukrainian language.

Such concepts were offensive to the peasants. They dragged down from the tribune any speakers who espoused such notions and rained blows down on them as enemies of the fraternal unity of the Ukrainian and Russian peoples.

This rancorous propaganda of the Ukrainian nationalists pushed the toilers of Gulai-Polye rayon on the road of armed struggle against any form of Ukrainian separatism because toilers saw in this chauvinism – which was in fact the ruling idea of Ukrainian nationalism – death for the Revolution.

While fighting was going on in Alexandrovsk between the Red Guards and the haidamaks, several train-loads of Cossacks were grouped along the Alexandrovsk - Apostolovo - Krivoi Rog line. These troops had removed themselves from the External Front and were on their way to the Don to General Kaledin. (Kaledin's movement was in essence a genuine throwback to the old monarchist system. It went under the flag of independence for the Don, but suddenly at its very heart appeared the black forces of reaction whose intention

was to use the Cossacks to finish off the Revolution and restore the rule of the Romanovs.)

On January 2, 1918, the Gulai-Polye Soviet, with the participation of the Union of Metal & Carpentry Workers and the A-K Group, met around the clock. There was a heated discussion about what urgent measures to take to prevent the Cossacks from reaching the Don, because, once they joined up with Kaledin, they would form a Front which would constitute a threat to all the conquests of the Revolution. We, the peasants, all agreed on this.

This long and tiring session inspired in all its participants one and same thought: we must, in spite of the obvious contradiction, form a united front with the government forces. We must arm ourselves and go to to the aid of the Left Bloc. Our devotion to anti-authoritarian ideas would allow us to overcome any contradictions. After annihilating the black forces of reaction, we would extend and deepen the Revolution for the greatest good of all oppressed humanity. I said then:

"Each of us present today must keep our final goal in mind and make sure our actions are compatible with this goal: no person must be dominated by another person – an idea which opens to us the road to peace, liberty, equality, and solidarity for the whole human family. At each step we must think about this and it will help us to remain true to all we have discussed and agreed to here."

In this way we resolved the problem of what our actions were to be in the immediate future.

CHAPTER 21

Armed peasantry go to the aid of the city workers – the Alexandrovsk Revkom and the Commission of Inquiry

On January 3, 1918, the Red Guard Commander Bogdanov addressed an appeal for help to the peasants and workers of Gulai-Polye.

During the night of January 4, our group issued an appeal to the peasants and workers, inviting them to take up arms. On the same night I handed over my chairmanship in the Soviet to a comrade, and placed myself at the head of the anarchist detachment, composed of several hundred peasants. Fully armed, we set out for Alexandrovsk.

I recall that just before leaving Gulai-Polye our detachment, at my insistence, elected its own commander. I refused the position because I foresaw that in Alexandrovsk my presence might be required away from the detachment arranging liaison between the city and the village. The detachment then elected as commander my brother, Savva Makhno.

A crowd of people gathered alongside the detachment. As we were leaving, the old men said to their sons who were in our ranks:

"You are going to your deaths. And we accept that. We will find the strength to take up your weapons and fight for your ideas, ideas which were unknown to us not so long ago but which we now accept. We will defend them to the death, if necessary. Don't forget that, dear sons!"

And the sons replied:

"Thanks to you for having raised us. Now we are grown up and able to assert in life the ideas of freedom, equality, and solidarity. We would be happy to see our fathers fighting for

these great ideals. But for the time being, follow our actions from a distance and, if we fail in the struggle against the enemies of the Revolution, you will defeat them here – and defeat them forever."

Our farewells were touching.

Each of us knew where we were going and why. As soon as we were seated in the carts carrying us to the train station[11], we burst into revolutionary songs. Happy smiles lit up the faces of these young revolutionary peasants, the people whom Marx and followers regarded as beasts of burden fit only for obeying orders. Now here they were, conscious of themselves and aware of their duty to the Revolution, hurrying to help the urban workers. For decades the socialists of all stripes had considered urban workers as their own cadre through which they would seize power and begin to rule over others.

These peasants, knowing the danger they faced, did not hesitate to hasten to the city. They weren't the kind of revolutionaries who like to take part in parades and whose radicalism is purely verbal – no! They were true working class militants, devoted to the anarchist ideal. They might make mistakes, but their mistakes were honest ones and happened only because they were making an effort to put their anti-authoritarian ideals into practice.

There were between 800 and 900 of them – and more than 300 were members of the A-K Group. They went to the city knowing that the urban workers were their brothers, were just as hostile as they to the domination of some by others, that they became upholders of authority only when, uprooted from their class, they fell under the sway of politicians.

As they left Gulai-Polye, the peasants knew that the happiness and freedom of the toilers of town and country depended on the going forward of a truly social Revolution, and so they hastened to the aid of the city which was being besieged by

11 Gulai-Polye was not on a railway line. The nearest railway station was 8 km. west of the village, on a line from Berdyansk in the south on the Sea of Azov to Chaplino in the north.

the enemies of social revolution, in fact, of Revolution in general.

Our detachment arrived in Alexandrovsk without incident. The city was quiet. The Red Guards were ensconced in their trains, only a few patrols roamed the streets.

By contrast the Alexandrovsk authorities were engaged in feverish activity. The Revkom, composed of Bolsheviks and Left SRs, had at first tried to regulate the life of the workers. But they did not succeed: the Federation of Anarchists stood in the way, keeping the workers up to date about the doings of the newly-elected municipal authorities. Then the Revkom decided to confine itself to setting up a united front against the Counter-Revolution. With this in mind they proposed that the Alexandrovsk Federation of Anarchists send two delegates to the Revkom.

The Federation appointed comrades M. Nikiforova and Yasha. M. Nikiforova was immediately elected deputy chair of the Revkom.

On the same day the Revkom asked our detachment to appoint our own representative. After consulting with the Alexandrovsk anarchists who had always supported us, the detachment appointed me to represent the detachment at the Revkom. Joining the Revkom was a necessity of the moment. Refusing to take part in the Revkom would, we believed, have a negative effect on any future ideological struggle with the Left Bloc.

Upon our arrival in Alexandrovsk, we protested against the continued detention of political prisoners: "Why have the prisons not been emptied?" Numerous peasants and workers had been incarcerated for refusing to recognize the regimes of Kerensky and the Central Rada. One of the Bolsheviks explained to us that they had not been freed because it was thought they would also rebel against the power of the Left Bloc.

After consulting with the workers who had tipped us off about these prisoners who were languishing in the crowbar hotel, we decided to send a representative immediately to the Revkom to demand their release. If the Revkom refused, we planned to force open the gates of the prison, free the prisoners, and burn down the prison.

Our detachment delegated me to go to the Revkom about this. The Revkom empowered me, the Left-SR Mirgorodsky, the SR Mikhalovsky, and some others to liberate the prison. We went there, had a look around, and listened to the grievances of the prisoners. Then we went to the prison office, exchanged opinions, and left. Our delegation was incomplete – the most important figure was missing. That was the Bolshevik Lepik who, behind the scenes, had just been appointed to be in charge of the Cheka; this was concealed from us at the time.

For me personally, having been incarcerated twice in that prison and knowing how dirty and uncomfortable it was, it was painful to leave without freeing anybody. But I limited myself only to expressing some criticisms of Lepik and, together with Comrade Mirgorodsky, got in a cab and returned to the Revkom.

After supper we all got together and decided to forge ahead. The prison was emptied.

Still acting as agents empowered by the Revkom, I and the Left-SR Mirgorodsky were then delegated to the Front-line Military-Revolutionary Commission at the Red Guard unit of Bogdanov. This was the first armed group from the north which had entered Ukraine under the pretext of "helping the Ukrainian workers and peasants in their struggle against the counter-revolutionary Central Rada."

I was elected Chair of the Commission by the Red Guards from Petrograd (Vyborg district), and Comrade Mirgorodsky was elected Secretary. The Commission had seven members.

We were brought a stack of files from the Commander's office, dossiers on the prisoners incarcerated in the railway wagons of the Stolypin-type[12] which were coupled to the troop train.

We were asked to examine the dossiers and give our conclusions. But Comrade Mirgorodsky and I protested against such a procedure. We insisted that we could in all conscience examine the paper work only in the presence of the accused against whom this paper work had been put together. Then we could ask the accused to explain to us who he was, under what circumstances he was arrested, where, etc. (Our fellow members on the Commission, Petrograders, agreed with our reasoning but, as subordinates of the Commander, were unable to protest with us.)

The Commander was indignant at our behaviour but felt unable to ask the Alexandrovsk Revkom to replace us with different people for moral, political, and strategic considerations. Indeed the Revkom was unlikely to agree and a whole storm would be raised against him, a storm which he and his Red Guards might not survive.

Consequently we were granted unlimited powers to summon each prisoner, ask them questions, read out the written evidence against them, and listen to their explanations and refutations of all these documents.

This Commission, which one could call a Military-Revolutionary Frontline Tribunal (and so it was considered by Bogadanov), kept me busy for three days. I worked feverishly, without taking time to eat or sleep.

There were a lot of prisoners. They were locked up in old tsarist, Stolypin-type wagons. Here were generals, colonels, and other ranks of officers. There were chiefs of police, public prosecutors, and simple soldiers from haidamak units. There was this in common about them: all, or almost all, were sworn

12 A railway wagon with compartments designed to transport prisoners, named after the tsarist Prime Minister Stolypin.

enemies not just of the October Revolution but of Revolution in general. Thus they knew what they were doing when they acted against it.

Nevertheless the majority of them were not guilty of the crime of which they were accused. Most of them were arrested in their own apartments, without weapons, even, one can say confidently, without a thought of taking up arms and fighting against the Revolution. They were arrested because of the denunciations of evil people. I mean people who, in order to conceal their own dirty past record viz-a-viz the revolutionaries, had become even more odious by reversing themselves and hypocritically supporting the Revolution. These people denounced those who, due to their own social situation, were formerly outside the revolutionary movement but yet did not hinder its development. These vile people fabricated accusations in order to save themselves and contrived to find enemies of the Revolution in all ranks of the population.

But to the commanders of Red Guard detachments these informers were welcome since their denunciations of "enemies of the Revolution" assisted in cleansing the rear areas of enemies.

In this way were combined, in the course of the Revolution, the meanness of some with the self-sacrifice of others, and this because those with full powers in the struggle against the enemies of the Revolution were unable to discern the duplicity of their self-appointed accomplices.

Under my chairmanship, the Commission examined over 200 dossiers and gave its opinion on each of them. There were many cases in which the persons involved were recognized by the Commission as being active enemies of the Revolution. The Commission remanded their files to the headquarters of Commander Bogadanov who forwarded them to the headquarters of Antonov-Ovseyenko. (This meant, in the Bolshevik-Left SR jargon of the day, that the accused would be shot.)

Among the detainees interrogated by the Commission, almost all of those who were acknowledged as guilty showed themselves to be weak and cowardly. Facing imminent death, they had recourse to the most shameful means to try to save their skin. We saw generals weeping. On the other hand there were colonels who regretted falling into the hands of the revolutionaries because they were convinced they could have organized a sizeable force of volunteers to help General Kaledin restore the Romanov dynasty. And as they were led out of the salon carriage where the Commission was sitting, they cried out: "Long Live the House of Romanov! Long Live Tsar Nicholas Alexandrovich, Master of All Russia! May He Crush the Revolution!"

Mind you there were only two such colonels who remained true to their aristocratic-monarchist principles.

Among the many accused released after the review of their case by the Commission, I especially remember the commander of the Alexandrovsk Military District. He was arrested for having followed orders from higher up to mobilize young recruits during the short-lived triumph of the Ukrainian Central Rada. There was no other evidence proving him to be an enemy of the Revolution. However, the Commission was divided on the question of releasing him. Four members of the Commission saw him as a convinced, active counter-revolutionary and insisted that the Commission accept their opinion and record the result in writing. Three members were against. It was clear that the district commander would be shot. A storm broke out among us. Comrade Mirgorodsky suggested to me that we quit the Commission and go back to the Revkom: perhaps the Revkom would delegate someone else in our place. The Petrograders started laughing at us, saying we were not conducting ourselves as revolutionaries. So Comrade Mirgorodsky and I explained to them how to act like revolutionaries. And then three of them changed their opinion that the district commander was so guilty against the Revolution that he must die. And the commander was

freed.

While we were studying the dossiers, the Red Guards led in some newly arrested persons: Mikno (the government commissar from the Kerensky period – the very same Mikhno who had threatened me with legal action four or five months previously for disarming the bourgeoisie in Gulai-Polye raion), the uyezd chief of police Vasilyev, the public prosecutor Maksimov, and Peter Sharovsky. The latter had been a member of the Gulai-Polye A-K Group and on May 1, 1910, betrayed our comrades Aleksandr Semeniuta and Marfa Piven, receiving for this vile deed 500 rubles of the 2,000 promised by the State for giving up A. Semeniuta. It was very painful for me to meet this old "comrade". On seeing me, he fell to his knees, raised his hands, and uttered: "Nestor Ivanovich, save me. My betrayal was unintentional. I talked too much to an undercover cop", etc.

Maybe I would have believed him, if not for information received from close friends while I was serving time at forced labour in Moscow. Furthermore, after my return to Gulai-Polye, this information was confirmed by Marfa Piven who was present when A. Semeniuta was killed. She had been struck by a bullet in the forehead but fortunately survived. Sharovsky's own brothers, Prokofii and Grigorii, had helped me in 1917 establish his role as a provocateur. One of them had even helped our comrade "Yaponetz" try to assassinate Peter Sharovsky soon after Semeniuta's death. Peter took two bullets but unfortunately was not killed. He himself showed that he was guilty. After recovering from his wounds, he bricked up all the lower windows in his house; and upon my return from prison he disappeared completely.

Then in Alexandrovsk I spotted him going around from one group of workers to another with a tin cup in his hand. When I tried to grab him, he escaped.

I made use of my influence with the Red Guard commander Bogdanov to insist that the revolutionary authorities in Al-

exandrovsk make the capture of Peter Sharovsky a priority. Bogdanov, without hesitation, dispatched two group of Red Guards to the square where I had seen Sharovsky, and they arrested him.

On January 6, 1918, I made a detailed report to the Commission (of which I was the chair) about who Peter Sharovsky was, and who A. Semeniuta was, and how Semeniuta had been betrayed by Sharovsky and how much reward Sharovsky received for his betrayal. In presenting my report I advised my listeners that I was not speaking to them as members of the Commission, but as Socialist-Revolutionaries and Bolsheviks who were to witness that Peter Sharovsky would not be killed unjustly. The Petrograd Bolsheviks on the Commission proposed handing over Sharovsky to Commander Bogdanov, but Mirgorodsky and I didn't agree with this and requested only that the Commander put Sharovsky in a holding cell until I was freed from pressing business. Then comrades from our Gulai-Polye group arrived: Filipp Krat, Savva Makhno, Pavel Korostelyev, as well as some members of the Alexandrovsk anarchist group. We repeatedly interrogated Sharovsky and then one of the comrades put a bullet in his head.

Another painful encounter was with the former commissar Mikhno. I had a gut feeling that it would be hard to establish his guilt before the revolutionary peasants and workers. He had ordered my indictment during his stint as Commissar of the Provisional Government for revolutionary actions carried out by the Committee for the Defense of the Revolution in Gulai-Polye raion. He demanded the Gulai-Polye Public Committee exclude me from any organizing activities. But when I wrote him a letter of protest in the name of the Gulai-Polye raion Peasants' Congress and insisted that he withdraw his demand, he did indeed withdraw it. I felt that in determining his guilt I would be prejudiced and that this would lead to his doom; and yet, he compared favourably with many of the zemstvo leaders of Alexandrovsk uyezd – he was known as an honest man and a liberal still in tsarist times. Moreover

I was persuaded that he shouldn't be destroyed just for carrying out his obligations as a government commissar of the Provisional Government, even if he was from a hostile camp. Our raion never followed his orders, always rejecting them, and he was powerless to impose them on us so long as the toilers had the upper hand.

Our Commission questioned him closely about all his actions, reminded him of his campaign against me and the "Committee for the Defense of the Revolution" in Gulai-Polye, and then released him.

Quite different were the cases of the prosecutor Maksimov and the uyezd chief of police Vasilyev. Both these characters, one a representative of the tsarist justice system, the other of the Provisional Government's police institutions, were regarded by the Commission, on the basis of a range of documents, as active enemies of the worker-peasant revolution. Both of them were, by the decision of the Commission, remanded to Bogdanov's headquarters. The Commission informed the Alexandrovsk Revkom about this decision. The Revkom was headed at that time by the Bolshevik Mikhailevich, the anarchist Maria Nikiforova, and several other revolutionaries well-known and influential in proletarian circles in the city. Hastily organized, the Revkom's hold on power was shaky which was why they tried to suck up to such members of the bourgeoisie who had not fled the city and who were lobbying behind the scenes to save Maksimov and Vasilyev. The chair of the Revkom, Comrade Mikhailevich, along with most of the other members of the Committee, hurried to the Commission, still sitting in Bogdanov's staff railway wagon at the southside railway station. They protested our decision in the matter of the prosecutor and the chief of police. Maria Nikiforova also showed up to support them along with several Bolsheviks from the Revkom and a delegation of Right SRs.

Our Commission was furious. According to documents presented to us by Bogdanov's headquarters, documents which

had been gathered by intransigent Bolsheviks, Maksimov, in tsarist times and continuing under the coalition of the SRs and SDs with the bourgeoisie, had always been an implacable enemy of the toilers and their aspirations for liberty. His guilt before the revolutionary workers and peasants was manifest. He had organized among the bourgeoisie in Alexandrovsk a committee of action against the Revolution. But he was able and energetic and the Bolsheviks, as became clear later, wanted to recruit him and indeed eventually they did.

When the Red Guards were attacking Alexandrovsk, Vasilyev mounted a machine gun on the roof of one of the buildings and helped the haidamaks repulse the attack. He killed or wounded many of the Red Guards. Moreover, when he was chief of police of the city and its district, people arrested were always beaten. According to documents collected by the Bolsheviks, he was aware of and approved of these beatings.

Based on all this, the Commission declared Maksimov and Vasilyev enemies of the Revolution and the people. Accordingly they were remanded to the Bogdanov's headquarters where the commander could either have them shot or release them because the decisions of the Commission were not binding on him. Nevertheless, he generally followed our decisions, immediately releasing those we had found innocent and shooting the guilty ones.

After taking notice of the protest of the Revkom and receiving the delegation of the SRs, the Commission asked Bogdanov's headquarters to cancel our verdict and consider the cases of Maksimov and Vasilyev still before the Commission as we had received new information about them.

I, along with Comrade Mirgorodsky, tracked down Bogdanov and secured his promise that the lives of Makismov and Vasilyev would be guaranteed until the conflict between the Commission and the Revkom on this matter was resolved.

I informed the SR delegation about this, and we began to

wrangle with the members of the Revkom. Mikhailevich and Maria Nikiforova invited Commander Bogdanov to take part in our discussion. Bogdanov came and made it clear that he supported the decision of the Commission. The discussion was heated. The Commission sent a written copy of a resolution to Bogdanov's staff requesting that the prosecutor and the police chief be held in a special wagon under strict guard until notified by the Commission.

The discussion lasted six of seven hours. The result was the members of the Revkom acknowledged the justice of the Commission's decision in the cases of Maksimov and Vasilyev. But, according to the Revkom, the Commission had not taken into account what was happening at the moment. Either today or tomorrow it might be necessary to abandon Alexandrovsk as Don and Kuban Cossacks were approaching the city in numerous echelons after abandoning the external front, heading for the Don to join the troops of General Kaledin.

Around Kaledin were grouped all the dark forces of the counter-revolution and their hangers-on – small rural proprietors, merchants, mill-owners. This bunch had all crawled together to build a counter-revolutionary Front for the monarchy and for their own privileges over the toilers. And they were going to do it on the backs of the Cossacks, who stood to have their families wiped out and their farms devastated.

The Revkom members insisted vigorously that if Bogdanov had Maksimov and Vasilyev shot, this would discredit the authority of the Revkom in the city. And if the city had to be abandoned, it would be that much more difficult to occupy a second time.

I had taken on the thankless role of member of the Commission for two reasons: (1) to see for myself and be able to explain to the revolutionary peasants, how the state socialists occupied themselves in these great days of the revolution, how these "fighters for freedom and equality" sacrified these great ideals for the privileges of their own power; and (2) in

order to gain some important experience in a time of great events.

I considered myself a militant revolutionary who had come to the city with other peasant-revolutionaries with one goal: to help the workers defeat the hired warriors of the bourgoisie – the haidamaks, and to disarm the Cossasks who had abandoned the External Front to help General Kaledin set up an Internal Front – against the toilers.

For me personally the argumentaton of the of members of the Revkom – the Bolsheviks, Right SRs, and the anarchist M. Nikiforova – seemed criminal. I told them so. Supporting my view were the Left SR Mirgorodsky, the three Red Guard Bolsheviks from Petrograd who were members of our Commission, and Commander Bogdanov himself.

Dawn was already breaking. Everyone was exhausted. The members of the Revkom were clearly mad at me but decided not to remove me from the Commission. The jesuitical politics which already at that time saturated the Bolsheviks and their hangers-on, the Left SRs, would not allow them to do so. They agreed to continue holding the prosecutor and the police chief under detention so that, on the one hand, they could save their lives, and, on the other hand, they could embarass me in front of the numerous peasant-revolutionaries from Gulai-Polye raion. Therefore they proposed a compromise resolution which read: "to transfer the prosecutor Maksimov and the police chief Vasilyev to the Revkom, which will collect further information about them and make a thorough examination of their cases." This deplorable resolution only enraged the Commission and we decided that, rather than submit the cases to the Revkom, they should be subject to a new review in which the Commission would take part. This decision, after some protests from the Revkom, was finally adopted.

At this time arrived news that almost 20 echelons of Cossacks were headed to Alexandrovsk from Apostolovo by way

of Nikopol, hoping to pass through on their way to the Don and Kaledin. After quarrelling all night, this news suddenly brought us together and we hurriedly transferred the two prisoners from their railway wagon to the Alexandrovsk prison, Cell #8. (In tsarist times I spent more than a year in this cell. The prosecutor often visited the prison and I complained to him that the cell was dirty, had lots of bugs, and little air. His reply was: "You want more air?" and with a malicious grin ordered me sent to solitary confinement for 14 days.)

The regimen in Cell #8 when I was there was like this: one visit per month from family, change of linen and bath twice a month, no looking out the window into the courtyard, etc.

Our meeting broke up and each of us returned to our posts. We proceeded to prepare our forces for action. We led them across the Kichkass Bridge to the right bank of the Dnieper in order to set up a battle line.

CHAPTER 22

Battle with Cossacks, negotiations, and an agreement

It was January 8 1918 and it was cold. Towards evening a fine snow began to fall presaging a slight thaw. Our combat units occupied their positions and dug trenches. We communicated by telephone with the Cossack commanders and arranged to name delegates who would meet half-way between the stations of Kichkass and Khortiz to establish clearly what each side wanted from the other.

Our delegation was composed of two commanders from Bogdanov's group, from the detachment of sailors – Comrade Boborikin, from the detachment of Alexandrovsk anarchists – Maria Nikiforova, and from the revolutionary peasantry of Gulai-Polye rayon and the Gulai-Polye A-K Group – myself.

Around 6 p.m. we travelled by locomotive to the appointed place. To meet us approached a locomotive with one wagon carrying the delegates of the Cossack units. This delegation was composed of both officers and rank-and-file Cossacks. But the rank-and-filers didn't say anything. The officers did the talking. They spoke arrogantly, sometimes even with swearing. In particular, there was a lot of swearing when Comrade Boborikin declared that we would not allow them to pass through Alexandrovsk with their weapons.

We spent a good hour jawing at each other and who knows how long we might have continued if the Cossacks had not declared outright that they didn't need any permission from us to cross the Kitchkass Bridge and pass through Alexandrovsk.

"We are," one of their delegates told us, "18 echelons of Cossacks from the Don and Kuban-Labinsk regions, and six or seven echelons of haidamaks of the Central Rada."

[The haidamaks supposedly came from Odessa and hooked up with the Cossacks in transit with the goal of penetrating to the left bank of the Dnieper to engage in a struggle there against the "katzaps".]

Hearing this bold declaration, which was accompanied by filthy language, our delegate replied: "In that case, we'll take off. Our negotiations are finished. We, the representatives of the peasants, workers, and sailors, see in your attitude the desire to provoke a bloody, fratricidal struggle. Bring it on! We'll be waiting!"

We immediately left their wagon and our locomotive carried us back to our lines. The Cossack delegation returned to their side.

Returning to our positions, we told our fighters that our parley with the Cossacks had led to nothing, that we could expect an attack at any minute, and that we must intensify the reconnaissance efforts of each unit and of the line of defense as a whole.

Then we sent a party down the track about one kilometre in the direction of the Cossacks and detached the rails in two places. When everyone had returned, it was about 1 a.m. and we anxiously awaited the attack of the Cossacks.

The night was overcast. The light snow which had been falling all evening was changing to rain.

Now it was already 2 a.m. The rain was coming down harder. The enemy had not showed himself and probably had decided to wait for dawn. Many fighters, sprawled in the trenches which they had just dug, talked among themselves. But the old soldiers from Gulai-Polye said to them: "Don't be fooled, Comrades, the Cossacks will try to take advantage of this bad weather by out-flanking us and seizing the Kichkass Bridge and Alexandrovsk."

Many laughed. But their laughter soon stopped because shortly after 2 a.m. our scouts reported they heard blows striking the rails. That was an advanced reconnaissance of the Cossacks which had reached the dislocated rails. They were checking the railway line to find out what state it was in.

Ten or 15 minutes later we heard a locomotive huffing and puffing.

"They're coming," was whispered all through our units.

"Keep quiet!" other voices whispered.

Our nerves were on edge. We were shivering.

"War – is a nasty business," said our fighters to each other.

I crouched down next to two of them and continued their thought:

"Yes, my friends, war is very nasty, we all know that but we still have to take our part in it.

"But why, why? Tell us Nestor Ivanovich," they insisted.

"So long as the enemies of our liberty have recourse to arms in order to fight us," I continued, "we are obliged to answer them in kind. Now we see that our enemies have not renounced arms. But at the same time they know well that the toilers no longer want to be paid servants but demand to be free, secure from any kind of forced labour. It would seem that this is enough.

"Our enemies, the pomeshchiks, owners of factories and plants, generals, bureaucrats, merchants, priests, jailers, and the whole pack of cops hired to protect the pillars of the tsarist-pomeshchik regime – need to understand this and not try to block the path of the toilers who are trying to complete their work of revolutionary liberation.

"Not only do they not want to understand, these parasites try to win over a certain number of state-socialists and, working with these class traitors, they invent new forms of authority

to prevent the toilers from winning their rights to a free and independent life.

"All these idlers do nothing, they don't produce their own needs but try to have everything they want without working. They want to run everything, including the lives of the toilers and always – this is their characteristic – at the expense of the toilers.

"Consequently they are responsible for this war, not us. We are only defending ourselves but that, my friends, is not enough. We can't limit ourselves to defense, we also must go over to the attack. Defense is fine if, having overthrown Capital and the State, we were living in abundance and liberty, if wage slavery had been replaced by equality, and if our enemies were arrayed against us with the goal of crushing us and reducing us to slavery again. But in a situation where we are still reaching towards our goal, we must plan to attack our enemies ourselves.

"Defense is closely linked with offense, but it also involves our brothers and sisters who are not fighting in the front lines but are carrying on with broadening and intensifying the ideals of the Revolution, which you, my friends, wrongly call war. In this sense the work of defense acquires its true character and justifies all the blood spilled by the combatants in the destructive phase of the Revolution; for this work consolidates the achievements of the Revolution without deforming their character or significance."

At this moment was heard a shout: "Machine gun section – fire!"

This command was addressed to a detachment with 16 to 18 machine guns which had followed our reconnaissance troops and set up their guns at a bend in the railway where they would face the approaching echelons of the enemy. (I did not approve of such a wasteful use of machine guns but at that time the Red Guards had three times as many machine

guns as they needed so they weren't considered valuable which is why these guns were moved so far in advance of our line of front.)

When the machine gun unit opened fire, I suddenly realized that I had been speaking to nearly 100 fighters, intently listening to what I said. Now they ran off to their posts. In answer to our machine guns, the enemy returned strong fire. Now began to crackle machine gun and rifle fire along the whole front which illuminated the whole line. The enemy's firing ceased. We also stopped.

I felt a great sadness at this moment, a sadness which was shared by my companions. They recalled the cruelty with which, in 1905-06, the Cossacks had suppressed the attempts of the working people who had dared to voice their demands freely in their own assemblies. Each of us, if we had not seen it ourselves, had heard about it. This memory gave more courage to our combatants, it incited them to despise death, to face even more resolutely these men, like all men capable of both good and evil, but who at the moment were marching, bursting with pride, under the banner of antiquated ideas and led by generals and other officers. These men, mistaken it's true, were forcing their way, weapons in hand, through revolutionary territory. They were headed to the "White" Don, to General Kaledin, to support reaction and make it triumph over the Revolution which had already cost the toilers so dearly. These men were our enemies, ready to strike us with their Cossack whips, with their rifle butts, to kill us outright.

Among our combatants sounded the cry: "Let's attack! We must not let them leave the wagons!"

But soon the Cossacks advanced again towards our lines and opened fire. The reply of our guns was so strong and accurate that the lead echelon moved backwards quickly, responding with only a few isolated shots.

The Cossack command had prepared a series of echelons which it dispatched from Khortiz station in support of the first train. But the first train, moving backwards rapidly, collided with one of the support trains, knocking both trains off the rails. The collision was so violent that many wagons were destroyed and people and horses were killed. The Cossack command was forced to withdraw all the echelons remaining at Khortiz station back towards Nikopol. At the same time they appointed a delegation of about 40 men, mostly Cossacks, to treat with us.

This delegation arrived under a white flag at around 3 p.m. on January 8, 1918. We met the delegation of Cossacks with great pleasure, led it to our command post, and with special interest asked what propositions it had after the failure to break through revolutionary territory by force. The delegation told us that behind the Cossack echelons were several echelons of haidamaks. These haidamaks dreamed of occupying Alexandrovsk with the help of the Don and Kuban Cossacks. Then the haidamaks intended to scour the villages, killing "katzaps", "yids", and anyone else who didn't profess the "orthodox faith" so they could raise the blue & yellow banner of pogroms over the land of "Mother Ukraine".

"But after the failure of our attack yesterday," the delegation told us, "after the destruction of trains and an evaluation of the strength of your forces and the support you enjoy among the population, the haidamaks withdrew in the direction Nikopol - Apostolovo. Our Cossack command has decided not to follow them but to enter into negotiations with you to arrange a free passage through your territories."

"We will agree to give up our arms," said the Cossacks, "but leave us our horses and saddles and, if possible, our sabres."

Our command did not agree with this, for it well understood that a saddled horse and a sabre constitute the essential equipment for a Cossack, not only on the march but for a

sudden attack on the enemy, especially if the enemy was like most of the revolutionary forces of that time – an untrained mob, only the raw material of a real army.

The delegation of Cossacks finally renounced their sabres, but insisted firmly on their horses and saddles. They argued that their tradition did not allow them to appear either at home or for military service without a horse and saddle. And our command, due to a whole range of considerations, tactical and otherwise, was compelled to concede on this point.

After the agreement, one part of the delegation returned to their echelon, the other part stayed with us.

The haidamak troops which had retreated to the Nikopol - Apostolovo line, learning that the Don and Kuban Cossacks had agreed to give up their weapons before the revolutionary front, retreated even further to the Verkhovtzevo - Verkhne - Dneprovsk region.

Over the next two and a half days the Cossack troops, 18 echelons strong, were disarmed and escorted into Alexandrovsk. Here they were able to re-stock their provisions and a whole series of meetings were organized for their benefit on the subject of the worker-peasant revolution.

During these meetings the Left Bloc tried to win over the Cossacks to its ideas and trotted out the best orators they had available. These characters were very militant verbally, they described themselves as "implacably devoted to the Revolution and its goals: the liberation of work, the abolition of the capitalist yoke and the police state". These buffoons promised the Cossacks complete freedom, yakked about autonomy for the Don and other regions which had been oppressed under the rule of the Romanovs and which had formed the "one and indivisible" Russia, the "Holy" Russia run for the benefit of thieves and swindlers.

Some of the orators ranted shamelessly about the national renaissance of each of the oppressed regions, in spite of

the presence at these meetings of their political opponents who knew perfectly well that all these beautiful words were contradicted by the real actions of the current government leaders and that, in pronouncing these speeches before a mass of Cossacks, they flagrantly lied.

However, the Cossacks paid little attention to what was said to them. They stood around and, occasionally, laughed.

Then the anarchists spoke, and in particular M. Nikiforova, who told the Cossacks that the anarchists were not promising anything to anyone, they only hoped that people would learn to know themselves, to understand their own social situation, and to want to gain their own liberty.

"But before speaking to you about all that in detail, Cossacks, I must tell you that up to now you have been the executioners of the toilers of Russia. Will you remain so in the future, or will you recognize your own wicked role and join the ranks of the toilers? Up to now you have shown no respect for the toilers whom, for one of the tsar's rubles or a glass of wine, you have nailed living to the cross."

At this point the several-thousand strong crowd of Cossacks removed their papakhas and bowed their heads.

M. Nikiforova continued her speech. Many Cossacks were weeping like children.

Near the anarchist's tribune stood a group of Alexandrovsk intellectuals who said to one another: "My God! How pitiful and pale seem the speeches of the representatives of the Left Bloc and the parties in comparison with the speeches of the anarchists and, in particular, with the speech of M. Nikiforova."

For us, hearing this from the mouths of people who always disdained us throughout all the days and years of the Revolution, it was very flattering.

But we didn't speak the truth to the Cossacks just to impress

certain people. We only wanted the Cossacks to understand how things really stood, and, so understanding, be able to free themselves from being the tools of the ruling class. Ever since they settled ages ago on the Don and Donetz, along the Kuban and the Terek, they had been the butchers of any attempt by labour to free itself. Yes, the Cossacks throughout their history had been the executioners for the toilers of Russia. Many of them had already realized this, but many still went to meet the revolutionary toilers with sabre and whip in hand.

All during their stay in Alexandrovsk (which lasted five days after this meeting), the Cossacks came en masse to visit the office of the Federation of Anarchists. They wanted to ask questions about anarchism and willingly answered questions put by the anarchists. Relations were established. Some of the Cossacks left an address so they could receive anarchist publications and exchange correspondence on questions concerning the Social Revolution.

The Cossacks of Kuban, those of the Labinsky area especially, were the most eager to keep in contact with us and I know several of them maintained an active correspondence with our anarchists. They asked for information about various questions of social organization and always requested any fresh literature. They sent whatever money they could.

The Don Cossacks were also very interested but not on such a scale. This can be explained on the one hand by the fact that they were less advanced socially and on the other hand because their territory had been transformed into a hotbed of reaction which aimed at destroying the Revolution. This reaction was headed by Generals Kaledin, Alekseyev, and Kornilov along with sundry tsarist functionaries and learned professors.

While the disarmed Cossacks were in Alexandrovsk, the revolutionary commander proposed that they come to the defense of the Revolution by opposing General Kaledin. Many of them accepted this invitation and declared themselves ready

to take up arms and leave for the revolutionary front. They were formed into sotnias and dispatched to Kharkov to put themselves at the disposal of General Antonov-Ovseyenko, commander of the armies of the south of Russia.

On the other hand, many declared that they wanted to see their children and parents since they had been away from home for four years. The revolutionary commander authorized them to leave but, in reality, they were also sent through Kharkov where they were relieved of their horses.

I'm not going to censure this act of the revolutionary powers of the Left Bloc, for the moment was such that allowing the horses, with saddles, to pass through the war zone meant, in effect, treason to the Revolution. But what irked me and others at the time was the fact that the Bolsheviks and Left SRs, in their negotiations with the Cossacks, acted not as revolutionaries but as Jesuits, promising them one thing and doing another. In doing so they created much evil. However, they always behaved like this. They sent an armoured car to break up a meeting of anarchists in Kharkov and spied on revolutionary organizations everywhere. This only presaged worse things to come for these two parties, now ruling the country, were revolutionary in name only.

CHAPTER 23

My observations on the Left Bloc in Alexandrovsk

The Front established against the advance of the Cossacks coming from the External Front towards Zaporozhe was dismantled. No more Cossacks were expected from that direction. All revolutionary units were withdrawn from the right bank of the Dnieper to the left – to the city of Alexandrovsk and nearby villages.

The goal of Bogdanov's staff was to advance in the direction of Crimea. The city of Alexandrovsk was left without defense and the inhabitants were obliged to organize themselves for this purpose. The workers began to do this.

The Revkom, with the support of its constituent parties, also began to display its "revolutionary" activity. Its activity consisted of arbitrary interference in the life the local peasantry and, of course, it adopted an imperious, even threatening tone, in its written and verbal orders.

The Revkom also acted boldly in city matters: it imposed on the bourgeoisie of Alexandrovsk a levy of 18,000,000 rubles.

Against, just as under the Provisional Government and the Central Rada, arrests started taking place. First on the list were the right-wing socialists (the anarchists, because of their influence in Gulai-Polye and Kamishevansky raions, could not be touched). At the Revkom one often heard talk of a "Commissar of the Prison", for that was almost the most important post in this "socialist" regime.

I often felt like blowing up the prison, but never succeeded in acquiring a sufficient quantity of dynamite or pyroxylin for this purpose. I spoke about this a number of times to the Left SR Mirgorodsky and M. Nikiforova, but I only frightened

them and they proceeded to heap all kinds of work on me which prevented me from approaching the Red Guards, who had all kinds of explosive stuff.

In Alexandrovsk, I plunged into any kind of work the Revkom gave me to do and carried it through to the end.

But to work like a horse and not know what was going on behind my back was not in my character – all the more so in that I was not a novice at revolutionary work. I wasn't working just to impress whoever happened to be "all-knowing" or "all-powerful" at the current moment.

I saw clearly that collaboration with the Left Bloc was impossible for an anarchist revolutionary – even in the struggle to defend the Revolution. The revolutionary spirit of the Left Bloc parties began to change noticeably as they sought only to dominate the Revolution and to rule in the crudest sort of way.

Observing their work in Alexandrovsk, and earlier at the uyezd and provincial congresses of peasants and workers, where at that time they were in a majority, I foresaw that the bloc of these two parties was a fiction. Sooner or later one of them would absorb the other for they both supported the principle of the State and its authority over the free community of toilers.

It's true that the toilers, the active element of the Revolution, could not notice this tendency of the political parties in time. They had such confidence in all the revolutionaries that they hardly concerned themselves with scrutinizing their ideas and actions. One constantly had to explain to them what was going on. And who could carry out this necessary function I often asked himself – the anarchists and only the anarchists!

And where at this time in the Russian Revolution did the anarchists have connections with the broad labouring masses? The majority of those claiming to be leaders of Russian anarchism were dragging along behind the centralizing powers

of the Left Bloc or not involved in any kind of direct revolutionary action, i.e. at the margins of the Revolution. This was true of the top cirlces of both the anarcho-syndicalists and anarcho-communists (about the anarcho-individualists I shall not speak, because they had no organizations in Russian or Ukraine).

Some independent working class and peasant anarchist groups, having belatedly arrived at some or other tactical decision, threw themselves into the revolutionary fray and were honourably consumed by it in fighting for their own ideals. But alas! They were used up in the storm of the revolution prematurely and without any, or very little, benefit for their own movement.

You might ask: how could things happen this way? Personally, I have only one response to give: "Not being organized, the anarchists lacked unity in action." The Bolsheviks and Left SRs, on the other hand, exploited the faith of the workers in the Revolution, methodically opposing their party interests to the interests of the workers.

Under other circumstances these parties would never have dared replace grass roots revolutionary activity with the shady scheming of their Central Committees. It was all too clear that there was no one to unmask their perfidy. The right-wing socialists allowed themselves to be led by the bourgeoisie. That left only the anarchists to lead the revolutionary forces of the toilers against these machinations. But we, the anarchists, did not have at our disposal an organized force with a definite and positive grasp of the problems of the day.

The Bolsheviks and the Left SRs, under the leadership of the crafty Lenin, noted these deficiencies in our movement and rejoiced. Because we were organizationally powerless, we were unable to oppose the statists from dominating the Revolution which from beginning to end had been connected with anarchist ideas. The statist parties approached the masses with more assurance, deceiving them with the slogan

"All Power to the Local Soviets", and created at their expense a party-state type of political power which subordinated all aspects of the Revolution to itself and especially the toilers who had only just succeeded in breaking their chains but were by no means entirely free of them.

By collaborating with the bourgeoisie when all working people were against this collaboration, the Right SRs and Mensheviks contributed to the success of the Left Bloc parties. At this point working people had not rejected the Right SRs, even if they had outstripped their programs. The Right Socialists, to avoid having to bear all the weight of their collaboration with the bourgeoisie, tried to drag working people along with them by referring to the "law" and the "legal power" of the Constituent Assembly, etc.

These ideas which the Right Socialists made so much of were already unacceptable to the toilers. The Right Socialists were objectively already acting against the Revolution. This resulted in the labouring masses giving their preference to the Bolsheviks and Left SRs as well as provoking absolute distrust and a hostile stance towards the Right Socialists.

This phenomenom, so tragic for the Revolution, was known to every revolutionary anarchist who worked with the workers and peasants and who shared with them the successes and errors of this turn in the Revolution.

It distressed me to see that the Left Bloc was not the revolutionary grouping necessary at the moment of the decisive conflict of labour with capital and governmental power. To reach this moment the revolutionaries had expended their strength, including their lives. But the Bolsheviks and the Left SRs were going to spoil the opportunity either by retreating before the reaction of the right socialists who were allied with the bourgeoisie or by massacring each other in a battle to see which would have the number one position in power. In any case the Left Bloc was not providing the help needed to the Revolution so that it could develop freely in its own

creative way.

Convinced of this, I gathered several comrades from the Alexandrovsk Federation of Anarchists (who brought with them sympathetic workers and soldiers) along with my comrades from the Gulai-Polye brigade. I shared with them my fears on the subject of the Revolution which was, in my opinion, threatened with death on all sides and particularly from the side of the Left Bloc.

I said to my comrades that it would have been better for the Revolution if the Bolsheviks and Left SRs had not formed a bloc because both parties want supreme power over the Revolution and incapable of sharing that power. Ultimately this would lead to a falling out with internal struggles which would cause enormous damage to the Revolution.

"One sees already," I said, "that it's not the people who are enjoying liberty but the political parties. The day will soon come when the people will be completely crushed under the boot of these parties. The parties do not serve the people, rather the people serve the parties. Note that it often happens nowadays that in some question which concerns the people, they are mentioned by name but all the decisions are made directly by the political parties. The people are good only to listen to what the governments tell them!"

Then, after sharing my impressions and my profound conviction that it was time to prepare ourselves to struggle against the schemes of these parties, I shared my plans, not with the whole group but with an intimate circle of fellow-anarchists. I had been mulling over these plans since July-August 1917 and they had partially been put into effect in our organizing work among the peasantry. These plans can be summarized as follows: since the peasants aspire to be their own masters, we ought to approach their local autonomous organizations and explain to them each move made by the socialists to gain supreme power and tell them that the Revolution which they, the peasants, had made had quite another thing in mind.

Namely the right of the toilers to liberty and free work and the destruction of any tendency to authoritarian power over the working classes.

If one wants to, one can always get close to the peasants. It's only necessary to settle among them and work with them – work honestly and tirelessly. When, through lack of knowledge, the peasants try to create something that could be harmful for the development of a free society, one must explain to them, convince them that it would be a heavy burden rather than a boon. Instead propose something which would respond to their needs without contradicting the anarchist ideal.

"Our ideal is very rich and there are many points in in which can be immediately put into practice by the peasants for their greatest good," I said.

My other plans were of a conspiratorial character. I did not speak of them at the meeting of comrades that day, but I had progressively prepared the members of the Gulai-Polye A-K Group to carry out these plans. Thanks to our intensive work among the peasants, we had created links with the population which would soon allow us to pass to the realizations of these plans. We, militant revolutionary anarchists, were called to act by the circumstances in which a variety of causes were placing the Revolution in danger.

After consulting with the Alexandrovsk comrades, I decided to sever my connections with the Revkom and return to Gulai-Polye with the whole detachment.

On the same day I ran into Comrade Mirgorodsky (Left SR) and invited him to have supper with me at the dining room of the Federation. When he arrived, I didn't beat around the bush but told him that the next day I would tell the Revkom that my detachment was withdrawing me as a representative and would not be sending another in my place.

Comrade M. Nikiforova and some other comrades from the

Federation begged me not to be in such a hurry. Mirgorodsky also tried to reason with me but I could not go back on a decision which had already been made with the agreement of my detachment. There remained only to formulate the decision officially in such a way that the Revkom would not interpret it erroneously.

At the Federation of Anarchists not everybody knew about this decision. When they found out, they asked me to explain the cause or the goal of my departure from the Revkom. At that time there were also some workers close to the Left SRs present. They also insisted that I say why I was leaving the Revkom and the city of Alexandrovsk.

I had to repeat what I had already told numerous comrades. I said that, in my opinion, there were already signs of a rift in the Left Bloc and this at a time when it had hardly been formed. The cause of this, again in my opinion, was, on the one hand, the historico-philosophical divergence between Marxism and Socialist-Revolutionary theory; and, on the other hand, the vanity which pushed each party to get the upper hand over the other in the mad struggle for power over the Revolution.

"It appears quite obvious to me," I said, "that in the not-too-distant future these two parties currently running the country will have a falling out and actually try to exterminate each other, threatening with ruin the Revolution and all that is best in it.

"Why in hell should I waste my energy here when I can see the beginnings of the real Revolution in the countryside? The peasants are becoming conscious in a revolutionary way, they are showing their will to struggle for their ideal of justice, we must help them!" I cried out furiously, to the astonishment of the comrades present.

"I'm not saying you must all go to the peasants, comrades. I know you well – you are used to the city and are close to the

workers. Work here, but remember that here the Revolution has passed from direct action to rules and regulations issued by the Revkom. In the villages, the Revkom will not have such an easy time of it. That's where the soul of the Revolution is, here is where the Counter-Revolution will be. Only an intensive organization of the revolutionary forces of the villages can prevent attempts to kill the Revolution."

To this my comrades from the anarchists and their friends, the Left S-R sympathizers, replied that the future will be revealed in due time. "But in the meantime the Left Bloc is still following the road of the Worker-Peasant Revolution. It is firmly staying the course. A majority of the toiling masses masses see this and support the Bloc. Consequently, to agitate against it or raise an insurrection would simply pave the way for the return of the semi-bourgeois Kerensky regime or, still worse, consolidate the position of the Central Rada which has almost abdicated from the the struggle for the liberation of the toilers. Such adventurism would be a crime against the Revolution."

"We deplore your attitude towards the Left Bloc," said my comrades, "and would be happy if you looked at things from a different point of view. As you yourself constantly stress, the revolutionaries must always be with the people in order to broaden, deepen and further develop the Revolution.

"Up to the present you and we have done this. What is stopping us from continuing this work? We all know that if the Left Bloc turns to the right, or tries to bring a halt before the toilers have attained their goals – liberty, equality and independent work – we will immediately pursue a campaign against it. And then each toiler will see and understand that we are right to rebel against the Bolsheviks and the Left SRs."

I recall that Maria Nikiforova and all the friends who worked with her in this city defended this position. She cited several times the name of Comrade A. Karelin[12], saying that before

12 Apollon Karelin (?-1926) founded the All-Russian Federation of Anarchists, an anarcho-com-

her departure from Petrograd she had talked to him a lot about this question and he said that this was the best attitude that we could take towards the power of the Left Bloc.

However, these reasonable-sounding arguments of my comrades didn't shake me in the least. I was profoundly convinced that the Bloc was not long for this world. A sign of this, besides those mentioned above, I found in the fact that Lenin acted without any control not only by the Party of Left SRs, but also by his own party, of which he was the creator and leader.

Having organized the peasants of Gulai-Polye and its raion where the Bolsheviks and SRs had no influence, I had an outsider's point of view on these things. I saw that Lenin intended to make of the Left SRs (among whom I saw none of the core members of the old SR Party) a toy in his hands. That's why I abstained from any reponse to the comrades and only said once more that I was nevertheless returning to Gulai-Polye.

While we were exchanging opinions about the Left Bloc and the future of the Revolution which it was trying to control, I received from the commissar of posts a telephonogram from Gulai-Polye. It announced that agents of the Central Rada had arrived in Gulai-Polye who, while declaring themselves supporters of the soviets, were carrying on an energetic agitation to persuade solders returning from the External Front to organize haidamak units in Gulai-Polye and its raion. The nationalists had already got started on this. The telephonogram was signed by M. Shramko.

This message helped me to quit the Alexandrovsk Revkom and hastened my departure for Gulai-Polye.

After drawing up an official document, recalling me from the Revkom in the name of the Gulai-Polye detachment, I went to the Revkom to submit this document as required

munist tendency which supported collaborating with the Bolsheviks, at least in the short term.

and to say goodbye. At the Revkom my recall was greeted unfavourably, the executive expressed its disapproval but in a restrained tone. When I explained the reason why I and the whole detachment were in such a hurry to get back to Gulai-Polye, the chairman of the Revkom, Comrade Mikhailevsky, pulled me aside into a private office and gushed that he was overjoyed that I was rushing back to my raion.

"Your presence in Gulai-Polye, Comrade Makhno, is necessary now more than ever. And besides, as I think you know already, we are thinking of dividing Alexandrovsk uyezd into two administrative units, on an initiative from higher up. It is proposed that one of these units be organized under your direction at Gulai-Polye!"

I responded to my "benefactor" that this idea didn't interest me, that it didn't fit in with my views on the subsequent growth and development of the Revolution.

"Besides," I added, "this all depends on your future successes, does it not?"

"But our successes are assured. All the workers and peasants are with us, and they already hold everything in their hands" exclaimed my ex-colleague.

"Have you not read the telephonogram I got from Gulai-Polye? And do you not understand what was in it?" I said to him.

"But, yes!"

"We'd better leave our conversation for later," I remarked. "Now you need to order the commandant of the Yekaterinoslav station to prepare an echelon for four o'clock to transport the Gulai-Polye detachment."

The order was given immediately.

I continued speaking with him and other members of the Revkom, including the anarchist M. Nikiforova. I talked about the clearly revolutionary mood in the raion and then, taking

leave of everyone, I departed for the station. A few minutes later members of the Revkom arrived at the station, most of them in an automobile, M. Nikiforova on horseback. They came to say goodbye again and see us off.

Once more I exchanged a few words with the directors of the Revkom. Then the detachment sang the anarchist marching song and the train left the station.

CHAPTER 24

Suppression of the zemstvo territorial units – formation of a Revkom by members of the Soviet – search for funds

During the time that I, along with our bunch of energetic revolutionary peasants, worker-anarchists, and sympathetic-to-anarchism non-party revolutionaries were absent from Gulai-Polye, guests turned up in the village – agents of the Central Rada. These were landowners of Gulai-Polye who had been appointed sub-lieutenants during the War and had now been sent into the countryside and villages to preach the idea of an independent Ukraine supporting itself on the backs of the "haidamaks" and the Cossacks.

We arrived in Gulai-Polye at night and during that same night I was informed by soldiers just returned from the Front that they had held a meeting at which agents of the Central Rada announced that troops of the Rada were concentrating in Podolia and around Kiev. These agents invited the Frontoviks to organize themselves here and seize power over the raion where there was currently a power vacuum.

As an added incentive, a certain Vulfovich, a Frontovik who called himself a "Maximalist", presented to the assembly several anonymous letters which affirmed that there existed in Gulai-Polye and its raion some kind of benevolent society which could make regular subsidies to an organization of Frontoviks, etc., etc.

I immediately decided to arrest the "Maximalist" Vulfovich. At 1 a.m. I went to the secretary of the A-K Group, Comrade Kalashnikov, and together we summoned a number of comrades. After talking things over, we arrested Vulfovich. He protested, declaring that he would protest to the A-K Group. (He knew I made regular reports to the Group about my ac-

tions while occupying official positions. The Group decided collectively if my actions were consistent with the tasks the Group had set itself. The same procedure was followed for any members serving on Soviets or Public Committees as a result of being elected by the toilers.)

He was convinced that I would get in trouble for arresting him. But I told him that he had been arrested in order to clarify from whom he had received the anonymous letters about a society in Gulai-Polye and its raion which had money available for funding the organization of troops for the Central Rada. Vulfovich stopped his swaggering; in fact, he entirely caved in and told us everything. He said he received the letters an hour before the meeting from Citizen Althausen, owner of a hotel in Gulai-Polye and the uncle of Naum Althausen, a provocateur well known to our group.

Citizen Althausen was also arrested right away. I explained to him the reason for his arrest and said that, along with Vulfovich, he would be remanded by the Soviet to a tribunal of the General Assembly of Peasants and Workers of Gulai-Polye.

Citizen Althausen realized that this matter was taking a serious turn. The General Assembly would demand to know the details of the existence in the raion of a secret funder of the Central Rada. He preferred to tell the truth right away.

"The Jewish community in Gulai-Polye," he said, "are afraid of the Ukrainian nationalists. That's why they decided to take the initiative to seek them out and offer them financial support. Then in the event of their triumph they would know that the Jews supported an independent Ukraine and those who struggled for it."

He added: "You realize, Citizen Makhno, there's nothing going on here that could harm the Revolution. The only loss would be to our Society because it would be paying this money out of its own pocket." And he pointed at his left pocket.

The comrade members of the Soviet of Peasants' and Work-

ers' Deputies, hearing that Gulai-Polye was in an uproar, hurried to join us. They were outraged by the conduct of the Jewish community and demanded the arrest and interrogation of all its leaders with the aim of finding out the truth about their odious behaviour in relation to the freedom of Gulai-Polye.

Realizing the hatred that the knowledge of this act of the Jews would provoke among the non-Jewish population of Gulai-Polye, I tried to keep the lid on things. I advised that we limit ourselves to interrogating Althausen and then make a detailed report to the General Assembly. We would ask that the whole Jewish community not be held responsible for the acts of a few.

The comrades from the Soviet agreed with me and trusted my judgement in this matter. Citizens Vulfovich and Althausen were immediately released.

Anyone who aspires to write an authentic history of Gulai-Polye would need to have been present at that General Assembly of Peasants and Workers. The insurgency in Gulai-Polye and its raion was unique in the annals of the Revolution, an uprising which, taking birth among the oppressed peasants, was sustained by all the toilers of the raion. When external forces tried to suppress it, the Revolution in Gulai-Polye exploded into a colossal movement which, alas, never reached its full development. It would be necessary to be present, I say, to be convinced of the seriousness and the extreme care with which the toilers approached a question which in other places in Ukraine would have given rise to beatings and killings of poor Jews, the innocent victims throughout Russian and Ukrainian history who have not enjoyed peace up to this time.

Certainly I had something to do with the way things were handled, but I made no attempt to diminish the significance of the problem and laid out all the evidence before the assembly. The assembly decided to leave matters to the

conscience of the Jewish community. But it issued a stern warning to the leaders of that community that a repetition of actions inimicable to the freedom of Gulai-Polye would be answered in a different way. They would then be dragged before a revolutionary tribunal.

And thus the issue was settled. The right of Jews to participate in meetings of the Soviets, to take part in the debates and decisions, was not abrogated in any way. We acknowledged the right of each person, without distinction, to freely express their opinion, provided they accepted and respected the right to destroy all that was harmful to the development of social Revolution, because the new Society which was struggling to be born demanded great sacrifices and prodigious efforts from our collective, creative forces.

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Up to this time in Gulai-Polye and its raion there existed a territorial unit known as the "zemstvo". But this term was no longer used because the Soviet had taken over all the social functions and, with the approval of the General Assembly of peasants, set up a Revkom charged with organizing and training our revolutionary armed forces.

The following were invited to belong to the Revkom: the A-K Group, the SRs (there were a few of them in the raion), and the Ukrainian SRs grouped around the "Prosvit" movement (having as leader the agronomist Dmitrenko). As for the Bolsheviks, there just weren't any of them.

The formation of the Revkom was the result of tactical considerations by the Soviet which were endorsed by the A-K Group. The Revkom, as an independent revolutionary entity authorized by the triumphant Left Bloc, would allow us to do a better job organizing the peasantry.

Our strength at that time did not allow us to address the needs of urban workers and indeed we still cherished vain illusions about our anarchist comrades in the cities. They existed in

a vacuum without any connection with the revolutionary course of events and engaged in sterile discussions, totally useless for our work.

In setting up the Revkom, the Soviet was faced with the question: which member should be entrusted with the ideological direction of the Revkom? The Soviet wanted to have an anarchist in this position and appointed me although I by no means pursued the job. I knew that no matter where I ended up, the Revkom would follow the line of the A-K Group, studied and refined by the Soviet and the Revkom and supported by the population.

As a result of prolonged discussion, the leadership of the Revkom, constituted as a military-revolutionary body, was entrusted to me. This position demanded initiative and decisive action.

After my departure from the Soviet there was a move to install Maxim Shramko as the new chairperson. A non-party worker-sailor, he was former head of the zemstvo, a post which I had categorically refused. (I even left Gulai-Polye temporarily when they were electing the zemstvo head in order to avoid listening to the arguments of the peasants trying to persuade me to run for this position.) But Shramko, after I had gone to the front in Alexandrovsk, gathered a band of marauders and led them to the Kosovtze-Tkhomirov estate (about two kilometres from Gulai-Polye) which, on my initiative, had been converted to an orphanage. He tore apart the valuable library (only half the books were ever salvaged) and removed the window frames. By doing this he discredited himself in the eyes of the peasants who had previously held him in high esteem. He was not entrusted with the chair of the Soviet and instead was given the task of making an inventory of equipment and livestock available on the estates of the pomeshchiks in preparation for the redistribution planned for the spring.

The chair of the Soviet was awarded to the Comrade Luc

Korostilev, an active member of our group before the Revolution, now only a fellow traveller.

The A-K Group asked that the functions of the Revkom be clearly defined. The Revkom declared publicly that its main task was the revolutionary organization of the toilers in order to unite all of them in the struggle to maintain the development and triumph of the Revolution. The Revkom recognized that the Revolution was under attack from all sides by enemies which were trying to reduce the toilers to a passive instrument in the hands of political parties struggling to seize power.

Then the A-K Group demanded that the Revkom take the initiative in disarming a battalion of the Berdyansk 48th regiment which was stationed in the city of Orekhov (35 versts from Gulai-Polye). These troops were more or less evenly divided between supporters of General Kaledin and supporters of the Central Rada. The Revkov was still too weak to take on an action of this sort (which the A-K Group understood), but expressed its whole-hearted support for the idea. The A-K Group then arranged to collaborate with the Alexandrovsk Federation of Anarchists. The two groups converged on Orekhov from two sides and disarmed the battalion.

The reaction from the ruling authorities of the Left Bloc was one of enthusiastic approval. Their regional commander, Bogdanov, said he was amazed and overjoyed at the actions of the anarchists and impatiently expected the weapons seized from the battalion to be turned over, either to him or to the Alexandrovsk Revkom. He felt confident this would happen because M. Nikiforova, still a member of that Revkom, had taken part in the seizure of weapons.

But there was no way that was going to happen.

The Gulai-Polye A-K Group had persistently followed its own line from July-August, 1917: to gain the hearts and minds of the peasantry and to encourage and support in them the

spirit of freedom and independence. The best members of the Group, many of whom had already perished, had been struggling to do this for 12 years. Now, when the Group had emerged from the underground and could speak openly, it proselytized its ideal with the sincerity and persistence of an apostle in clear and simple language accessible to the peasants without recourse to nebulous, meaningless phrases from yesteryear. The Group wanted to see its work brought to fruition; it decided this was the appropriate moment to create a military force without which the labouring classes would not be able to cope with their numerous enemies. The Alexandrovsk Federation supported us in this. Therefore all the weapons: rifles, grenade launchers, and machine guns were transported to Gulai-Polye and officially placed at the disposition of the Guli-Polye Revkom.

The toilers of Gulai-Polye and the neighbouring villages and countryside became still more resolute. They sent their own representatives to Gulai-Polye with declarations about their willingness, both young and old, to take up arms to defend their independence and freedom from any power, even the revolutionary power of the Left Bloc if it should try to interfere with the new forms of life which the peasants had freely developed among themselves.

I, as director of the Revkom, would have been entirely tied up in its business if our Revkom had been like the other ones of that time. But every day, even several times a day, the A-K Group pulled me away from my work to meet with various representatives of the peasantry from various villages or even other raions. These peasants never failed to present themselves at the office of the A-K Group to find out the latest plans of the Group, plans which had not yet been publicized by our itinerant propagandists. We went over our projects with them, trying to decide where would be a good place to begin such and such and how to defend our work from the authorities.

"What happiness!" exclaimed the peasants who visited the A-K Group, the Revkom, or the Soviet. "We are really starting to feel the soil of liberty under our feet." And their joy was immense.

Our work took on gigantic proportions. But our financial resources were completely inadequate.

I and number of the other comrades were preoccupied with this problem because the organization of combat forces required a considerable outlay of money. I knew that I had only to apply to the Alexandrovsk Revkom and they would send the necessary funds. But I didn't want us to do this, either in my own name or on behalf of the Group, because my goal was to create a revolutionary bloc of peasants entirely independent of any political party and especially of any government institution.

After long hesitation, I decided to propose that the Group discuss the following: in Gulai-Polye there was a branch of the Commercial Bank which we had deliberately not confiscated so far. The funds of the bank were located in the Alexandrovsk State Treasury, but the branch still carried on paper work, hoping that after the October Revolution it could return to its old job of earning profits for the idle rich. It occurred to me to propose to the bank that it deposit a certain sum of money for the needs of the Revkom.

I recall that we wrestled with this idea for over a week. The Group was against the idea in principle. It is only with difficulty that I extracted a promise from the Group not to prevent me from presenting this question to the Revkom. I promised to take full responsibility if the bankers refused to go along with my proposition voluntarily.

In giving its consent, the Group warned me that, according to our internal code, it could require me to give up the Revkom and the Soviet and confine myself exclusively to working for the Group. I was always prepared for this. I had even insisted

on this more than anyone else when we drafted the articles concerning the unity of the Group and the duties of members towards the Group and its work.

I received a guarantee from the Group that our other members on the Revkom would support my proposition to ask the banks to contribute 250,000 roubles for the needs of the Revkom. Then I called a joint meeting of the Revkom and the Executive Committee of the Soviet.

I opened the meeting by announcing that there were unverified rumours that Central Rada was carrying on negotiations for a peace treaty with the Germans and that the Bolsheviks, breaking with their Left SR allies and with the revolutionary population, were also in a big hurry to make peace with the German kaiser.

"It's true," I said to the gathering, "that these stories must be verified and that will be done in the next few days. But I can personally affirm in complete certainty that the Central Rada has already concluded a dishonourable alliance with the German and Austrian emperors, Karl and Wilhelm. [Note: I had some letters from Odessa and Khotin, delivered by a comrade, which confirmed this news.]

"This is the decisive moment of the Revolution. Victorious will be those who prepare themselves in time. We must arm ourselves to the teeth and we must arm the whole population, since the Central Rada and the Bolsheviks, by allying themselves with the emperors, will kill the Revolution. We must prepare to be attacked, we must repel the attack and thus save our revolutionary conquests.

"We must make our way without any compromises, without any dependence on the revolutionary authority of the Left Bloc, the same as we did for the Central Rada and the coalition of Kerensky with the bourgeoisie. To succeed, we must act independently on all fronts of the Revolution."

Then I explained that we needed money and that the uyezd

Revkom in Alexandrovsk would be delighted if we asked it for money but that this would be fatal for the Revolution in Gulai-Polye. For that would give the uyezd authorities a lever to try to suppress our liberty and independence.

"But we need money and the money we need is right here in Gulai-Polye or, at least, we can get it here without having to suck up to the authorities and give them the idea that we will soon be prostrating ourselves before them. As long as we use our heads, we won't have to go begging."

Several voices interrupted: "Tell us, Comrade Makhno, where is this dough and how can we access it for the common good?"

"I'll explain that to you in good time. But first I want to say a word about what I see in our own ranks and in the ranks of our enemies. Of course our enemies are of various sorts on the various fronts but they say they are fighting for liberty; against reaction; whereas in practice they are fighting for reaction, against liberty.

"Comrades, none of us here will deny that among the toiling peasants the desire for independence and freedom from economic and political slavery has grown and grown. And who helped the peasants to develop in this way? Why the Revolution itself and the persistent, hard-working members of the A-K Group of which I am a member.

"What the results will be of this raised consciousness among the peasants it's hard to say at the moment, since we have so many enemies and so very few friends. And our friends aren't even where we need them. They are holed up in the cities and show themselves occasionally. I'm referring to the anarchists. They and only they do not want the oppressed countryside to remain oppressed by the urban authorities. But they make little effort to help the oppressed peasants compared to what they could be doing. There are reasons for this, it's true, but it's difficult to explain and hardly worth the effort. Neverthe-

less the anarchists are always with us in spirit!"

[My speech was interrupted by applause and cries of "Long live anarchism! Long live the anarchists – our friends!"]

"Calm yourselves, friends, I'm getting to the main point. The main point is that we must arm ourselves, we must arm the whole population so that the Revolution will have a powerful army so we can begin to build the New Society ourselves, with our own means, with our own reason, our own work, and our own will.

"The toilers of this raion have, since the autumn of 1917, begun this task but now find themselves menaced by the black forces of reaction: the authority, on the one hand, of the Bolsheviks and the Left SRs; on the other hand, the Ukrainian Central Rada. The Central Rada, I'm reliably informed, has formed an alliance with the rulers of Austria and Germany and with their help will deliver, under the banner of saving 'Mother Ukraine', death to all the wonderful revolutionary gains made by the Ukrainian toilers.

"Arming the whole population is feasible only if the population recognizes its necessity. During the past week, I have received here at the Revkom, and the secretary of the AK Group has received at his office, many representatives of the peasants from all over the raion who have spoken with one voice about the necessity of arming of the people.

"But this isn't enough: we must go out to the peasant assemblies and hear the same will expressed there. Then we must discuss with the peasants how we can realize this goal with the best results. So now we need to send out propagandists everywhere. We'll have to interrupt the peasants' preparations for spring sowing so we can borrow wagons and horses. Or we can rent conveyances. Either way we must pay for them. So we need money.

"We don't have any money, but our enemies do – right here in Gulai-Polye in the homes of the pomeshchiks and merchants.

Their bank is almost next door!

"I must say to you, nevertheless, comrades, that the bank vault is empty. All the cash is in the State Bank in Alexandrovsk. But we can still have it. It's a matter of accepting my proposition.

"The whole time the Revolution has been going on, the Credit Bank in Gulai-Polye has been speculating and pillaging at the expense of labour. Truly, it should have been expropriated long ago and its assets transferred to a common fund for the toilers. Neither the Coalition Government of Kerensky nor the Bolshevik-Left-SR government have done so and they have prevented the revolutionary people from doing so. That's why I propose that the Gulai-Polye Raion Revkom resolve to disregard the Left Bloc government and demand that the directors of the bank hand over to the Revkom 250,000 rubles to be used for revolutionary goals and that they do so within 24 hours."

This resolution was passed unanimously.

The next day I went to the bank and informed the directors about this resolution. They asked the Revkom to extend the time limit to three days. Then they called a general meeting of their depositors at which the SD Zbar was the Revkom's representative. With his encouragement, the depositors signed cheques proportional to the size of their deposits in the bank. As for those depositors who didn't show up at the bank meeting, they received visits from an agent of the bank accompanied by a member of the Revkom. In the course of four days all the cheques were collected and on the fifth day a member of the Revkom empowered by the bank traveled to Alexandrovsk and received the correct sum of money.

The toilers of Gulai-Polye thus assured the success of the first stages of the Revolution by acquiring the pecuniary means for revolutionary propaganda and the organizing of Labour against Capital and State Power.

Part of the money was put at the disposal of the Soviet for social needs. A second portion was, on my initiative, set aside for founding and maintaining an orphanage for children who had lost their parents as a result of war. A third part, the largest, was turned over to the Revkom. Half of this sum was made available for the temporary use of the Provisioning Section of the Soviet. This section, created by the Soviet and approved by the General Assembly of peasants and workers, was directed by Comrade Seregin from the A-K Group. The function of this section was to provide the population with necessary goods of consumption. It was so successful at this that it soon attracted the envy of the central authorities who began to place obstacles in its way.

CHAPTER 25

How the exchange of goods between city and village was organized and how we struggled to make it work

From the beginning of its work in organizing the peasants, the A-K Group had insisted on the necessity of carrying on this work in an anarchist manner. We needed to apply anarchist principles consistently in a various contexts.

At first our tactics aroused protests from some members of the Group. Although entirely devoted to the cause, they were used to the old ways: negation of organization, of unity of action, of the possibility of remaining anarchists while applying its principles under a regime that was not anarchist, not even truly socialist. I was often told: "Comrade Nestor, apparently in prison you became imbued with statist ways of getting things done and now you are carried away with doing things that way and this will lead to a split in our group." In particular, this thought was often and sharply expressed to me by Comrade Moise Kalinichenko, my old friend who had been a member of our group from 1907, a self-educated worker who was ideologically rock-solid.

Nevertheless, everything I proposed was accepted by the group and put into practice among the peasants during 1917 with the greatest success. Indeed, the peasants listened to us with an attentiveness and confidence which they did not extend to any other social or political group. The peasants followed the guidance of our group in the following areas: the land question, the negation of authority over their own lives, and the struggle against oppression no matter what the source. This showed the way for our comrades: to not separate oneself from the masses but to dissolve oneself among them while remaining true to one's ideals, and then to struggle forward despite all the obstacles which the politicos put in

the way and which held back the movement.

Thus the members of our group became accustomed to the principle of collective unity in action and, even more important, in action which was well thought-out and fruitful. They learned to have confidence in one another and respect one another's competence in their own area of expertise.

These characteristics, essential in the life and struggle of any organization – and especially an anarchist organization – allowed our group to hold together before the vicissitudes which faced the Ukrainian toilers in those years when "governments" multiplied: one in Petrograd, another in Kursk, a third in Kiev, etc. And they all tried to plant their foot on the neck of the toilers, to control them and rule over them.

The reciprocal confidence of our members led to the spontaneous enthusiasm which allowed each of them to display the energy and initiative which the Group directed towards goals established by common accord. A good example of this was the maximum of initiative shown by the comrade who directed the Provisioning Section. The Group encouraged him to make use of his authority as head of the provisioning organ to establish direct connections between Gulai-Polye raion and workers of textile factories in Moscow and other cities for the purpose of exchanging goods. The workers would supply the population of Gulai-Polye raion with textiles of pre-determined quality, colour, and quantity and the raion would provide them with grain and other produce needed by the workers.

Comrade Seregin sent his own agents to the cities and travelled all over the raion himself to meet worker delegations which were scouring the countryside looking to find grain they could buy. These delegations were under the control of members of the Cheka and other government functionaries. In the course of two weeks he established connections with workers of the textile factories of Prokhorov and Morozov. They agreed in a comradely way on the necessity for toilers

struggling for freedom and independence to support each other: the peasants sending grain and other foodstuffs to the workers, the workers furnishing the peasants with textiles.

I recall with what great joy Comrade Seregin, upon his return to Gulai-Polye, without taking time to stop at his own apartment, ran to find me at the Revokom and hugged me, saying: "You were right, Nestor, when you insisted to the Group on the necessity of fusing ourselves with the labouring population: explaining, advising, and moving forward with them towards our goals. All the toilers are behind us."

Then he asked to speak to the secretary of the Group – Comrade Kalashnikov and the chairperson of the workers' section of the Soviet – Comrade Antonov. He told them how warmly, how sincerely the worker delegation of the Moscow textile factories received our idea of the direct exchange of goods. He said the worker delegation was overjoyed to learn that the ideal of a free society was not dead in the countryside because this ideal had cost the workers many sacrifices. They had the feeling that over their cherished dream – to live free and independent lives without being subject to oppression – was hanging a threatening cloud.

"It's true," said the workers, "we can't let ourselves get discouraged, but we can't help but be depressed about the situation which is developing."

Comrade Seregin told us that the worker delegation was delighted to meet the peasants, delighted to make the agreement for mutual aid, but was also worried that the government's food requisitioning detachments would stop and even confiscate our shipments to the city.

The worker delegation had instructed Comrade Seregin on how to sent produce to the city. Two or three days later two members of the delegation arrived in Gulai-Polye in order to sound out the mood of the peasants in this insurgent raion. They were met with fraternal hospitality and were assured

that we were committed to defending the great principles of the Revolution – liberty and the freedom to work without being subject to the authority of capital and the state.

After several days these two worker delegates left for Moscow.

Comrade Seregin made a report to the General Assembly of peasants, a report to which, at the request of Comrade Seregin and A-K Group, I added some depth. I pointed out that this was the finest example in history of a reciprocal agreement between two labouring classes: the proletarians and the peasants.

The General Assembly approved the scheme with enthusiasm, not worrying that their shipments might be confiscated by government agents. The peasants helped the Provisioning Section over the course of several days to load several wagons for speedy dispatch to the workers of the textile factories.

The A-K Group formed a detachment, commanded by Comrade Skomski, to accompany this shipment all the way. And the grain, despite all sorts of delays deliberately caused by the commandants at railway junctions on the route, eventually reached its destination.

About ten days later, the textile workers of Moscow dispatched several railway wagons of textiles to Gulai-Polye. But en route blocking detachments of the government food organs stopped it and directed it to the Provisioning Centre in Alexandrovsk.

"Because," said the government agents, "without the permission of the central Soviet authority, it's impossible for peasants and workers to exchange goods. Soviet power hasn't yet provided any examples of direct exchanges between workers and peasants and until it does we can't allow this to go on." This rationale was accompanied by all kinds of verbal abuse directed at the toilers of Gulai-Polye raion and the A-K Group.

Informed of this incident, Comrade Seregin ran to the Revkom and asked for my advice on what to do to prevent the Alexandrovsk government organ from confiscating the textile shipment.

"For if we don't receive the textiles," he cried, "our suffering will be doubled: materially, because the grain is gone, and morally, because our beautiful social initiative will have failed. Help!" He wept, holding his head in his hands.

Keeping our calm, at least in appearance, we convoked an emergency meeting of the Revkom and Soviet and decided to sent a protest to the Provisioning Section of Alexandrovsk in the name our two revolutionary organizations. We complained about the anti-revolutionary action of seizing a shipment which was intended to go elsewhere and we said we were prepared to label the Section as harmful to the Soviet government, if indeed it was really part of that government.

At the same time we called a General Assembly of the peasants and workers of Gulai-Polye. I also decided to dispatch three members of the A-K Group – Moisei Kalinichenko, A. Marchenko, and P. Sokruta – who also happened to be members of the Revkom, to inform the toilers of the whole raion about the seizure by the government Provisioning Section of Alexandrovsk of the textiles sent to them by the factory workers of Moscow.

The secretary of the A-K Group, Comrade Kalinichenko, after conferring with a number of members who had arrived for the General Assembly, told me that my initiative had been approved by the Group. I wrote down quickly the essential points that our agents would have to put across. I knew these comrades well and what they were capable of accomplishing.

Our three agents left and I went to the General Assembly, accompanied by Comrades Antonov (president of the Professional Union), Seregin, and Korostelev (president of the

Soviet).

This was truly a meeting of the old "Zaporozhian Sich" as we knew it from the history books. The peasants were not as credulous as in olden times and they no longer met to discuss questions of church and faith. Now they met to talk about the violation of their rights by a handful of government officials; and they were fully conscious of those rights.

Comrade Seregin took the floor. His speech was greeted with incessant applause for his initiative and cries of indignation against the actions of Alexandrovsk.

After Comrade Seregin, others spoke on behalf of the Soviet, the Revkom, the Trade Union, and the A-K Group.

The population demanded an immediate march on Alexandrovsk to drive out the authorities entrenched there – authorities who were useless, indeed doing harm to the toilers. This demand was not just a matter of empty phrases: the toilers at that time had at their disposal numbers of militant youth quite sufficient to occupy the city of Alexandrovsk and expel, if not shoot outright, the government functionaries.

"The Revolution proclaimed the principles of freedom, equality, and free labour," said the oppressed toilers of Gulai-Polye raion, "and we intend to see these principles applied. We shall kill all who try to stop us. The government of the Left Bloc, in spite of its revolutionary character, is harmful to the creative forces of the Revolution. We will destroy it or we will die trying. We will not tolerate the obstacles this government puts in the way of the free development of our forces and the improvement of our social condition. We will not accept the humiliation and oppression which this government's agents seek to impose on us and on all that is beautiful in the Revolution."

Yes, the labouring population of Gulai-Polye on that day was ready to rise up against the government of Alexandrovsk. And who was against this idea? Why no one! We, who had

been militants from the first days of the Revolution, would not recoil from such an act because we weren't the kind of revolutionaries who need a party membership card in their pocket to prove their militancy. We were revolutionaries because we were dedicated to the idea of the triumph of justice – the idea the Revolution had chosen as its credo. We couldn't allow this inspirational idea to be soiled by compromise with the authorities. We considered it our duty to keep this credo from being soiled by the two parties ruling at that time – the Bolsheviks and the Left SRs. We strove to broaden, deepen, and develop further the Revolution in the lives and struggles of the toilers.

Certainly we did not have sufficient forces for such a momentous task. Nevertheless we wanted to make the attempt with the forces we had at our disposal, knowing full well what would be the real results of such an effort.

That's why there was not one comrade among us who spoke against marching on Alexandrovsk – on the contrary, everybody was up for it.

I was personally convinced that the time was ripe for myself and several comrades (Kalinichenko, Marchenko, Petya Isidor, Liuty, S. Karetnik, Savva Makhno, Stepan Shyepel) to become first among equals and lead the revolutionary forces into combat. And it seemed, indeed, that this was really going to happen.

Some cries rang out from the crowd: "Nestor Ivanovich, tell us your opinion! We must respond to this shameful provocation directed against us by the agents of the government in Alexandrovsk."

I, as the chief of the revolutionary troops of the raion, knew what these troops were capable of. I said what I had to say: that the decision of the toilers in this case reflected their beliefs, that I shared their beliefs, and would carry out their wishes.

At this moment Comrade Seregin received a telegram from the Alexandrovsk Government Provisioning Section. This telegram announced that the Provisioning Section of Alexandrovsk had received the telegram from the Gulai-Polye Revkom and Soviet, and acknowledged that the textiles redirected to the Section had already been paid for by the toilers of Gulai-Polye. Therefore the Section, in agreement with other Soviet organs in Alexandrovsk uyezd, had decided to allow the textiles to be released to Gulai-Polye. It was only a matter of sending some people to receive the shipment and accompany it to Gulai-Polye.

When this telegram was read out to the General Assembly, the audience rejoiced but they by no means abandoned the idea of preparing for armed resistance. The meeting expressed the wish that Comrade N. Makhno organize the armed forces so that if Comrade Seregin had not received the textiles within two days, the troops could be mobilized within a day and the city of Alexandrovsk occupied.

"We have no reason to march at the moment," said the peasants. "We're not looking to pick a fight over nothing. But we should be ready to march whenever it's necessary – that's what we think now and that's how we will think in the future."

Within a day Comrade Seregin told the Revkom that he had received news from the agents he had dispatched to the effect that they had received the goods and they had now arrived at the Gulai-Polye station. Therefore he called another General Assembly of peasants and workers at which he was empowered to ask the peasants to help organize the transport of the textiles to the provisioning depot and also to arrange for distributing the textiles to the population of Gulai-Polye.

Comrade Seregin asked me, as well as other comrades from the Revkom and the A-K Group to attend the meeting and help him explain to the population the advantages of such exchanges between city and country, exchanges which ought to

be carried out on a greater scale and extended to all branches of consumption.

The General Assembly proceeded under the following theme: how to arrange the exchange of goods between city and country without the intermediary of state power.

The example was before our eyes: without the intermediary the country would get to know the city better and city would get to know the country better. This was a necessary condition for successfully unifying the two class forces of labour for the common goal – to relieve the State of all power over public functions and abolish its social authority; in short, to abolish it.

To the extent that this great idea developed itself among the toilers in Gulai-Polye and its raion, to the extent that they adopted it, they took up the struggle against the authoritarian principles which were impeding them. The toilers grasped the importance of these exchanges of goods and affirmed their right to carrying out these exchanges.

At the same they also saw such exchanges as a way of undermining the bases of capitalism in the Revolution, vestiges which remained from tsarist times. That's why, after all the textiles had been distributed, the population of Gulai-Polye considered how they might extend the exchanges to all essential objects of consumption. This would prove that the Revolution was not just about destroying the bases of the bourgeois-capitalist system, but also about planning the construction of a new society on a basis of equality in which would grow and develop the free consciousness of the toilers. Their lives would then be devoted to the struggle for a "higher justice" in place of the injustice which now prevailed and which was rooted in people exploiting and oppressing one another.

The toilers of Gulai-Polye conferred with the toilers of other villages and raions in order to bring about the exchange of

goods between city and country and to coordinate this with the existing situation where the Revolution had to be defended. But the defense of the Revolution will be steadfast and durable only if the non-exploiting classes recognize its essentially creative character. This can only happen when, after casting off the yoke of the bosses – the factory owner and the estate owner – and that of the supreme boss – the State – the people organize themselves for their new social and political life and that they defend it. Consequently, it is essential that the toilers of the villages, in order to better understand and defend more effectively the creative principles of the Revolution, draw closer to the city workers. The village toilers will thus have a better sense of their role in creating the Revolution.

The destructive period of the Revolution will be completed only when the creative phase begins, the phase which will involve not only the revolutionary vanguard (and its detachments), but the whole population, Inspired by the flame of the Revolution, the people will try to help it, in acts and in words, to overcome the obstacles which turn up.

During the ten or eleven months of their active participation in the Revolution, the toilers of Gulai-Polye raion had many occasions to verify the correctness of this scheme and apply it to develop their own lives in a free and healthy way – forged by them daily in their own practical activity.

This healthy social phenomenon in the life and struggle of the toilers generally and of the toilers of Gulai-Polye raion in particular could not help but be noticed by the Left Bloc headed by Lenin. The Left Bloc noticed this phenomenon from the first days of its appearance on the revolutionary scene. And this so-called ultra-left socialist power entered into open struggle with it. First this affected communications between city and country, and then the authorities took on the role of determining the degree of revolutionary character and legal rights not only of individuals, but of the whole

working class. We're talking here about the right to use their own intelligence, their own will, about their very participation in the Revolution on whose behalf it was supposedly being carried out.

Thus the textiles, coming from the city factory workers to the peasants in exchange for the products of agriculture produced through the peasants' labour, were distributed among the population of Gulai-Polye and its raion by the Gulai-Polye Co-operative and the Food Board. The raion Soviet, together with the provisioning organizations, decided it was necessary to broaden and deepen the concept of exchanging goods between city and country without the usual intermediaries – agents of the state and their functionaries.

Delegates were sent to several cities to investigate various questions concerning the practical side of goods exchange. Meanwhile the peasants began to build up stocks of wheat, flour, and other food products in a special warehouse which henceforth was designated to store goods destined for future exchange. This time, however, our delegates returned for the most part with empty hands. The authorities of the Left Bloc had, in all the workplaces, categorically forbidden the proletarian organizations from entering into any sort of direct relationship with the villages. For this purpose there existed – according to the authorities – proletarian organizations: Prodorgans. These statist entities were charged with organizing the industrial and agricultural development of the cities and villages, thereby consolidating socialism in the whole country.

Only in Moscow were the revolutionary workers of the textile factories able to obtain from the ruling socialists the right to exchange once more their goods against the products of Gulai-Polye raion. But the shipment of textiles was extremely difficult. It was stopped several times en route. The government "prodorgans" shunted them from one railway siding to another for over two weeks until rail transport came to a

complete halt because of the war situation. Powerful German armies, accompanied by detachments of the Central Rada and the Ukrainian SRs and SDs, were advancing on Kiev and Odessa. The leaders of the Ukrainian SRs and SDs, Professor Hrushevsky and the publicist O. Vinnichenko respectively, had concluded an alliance with the German and Austrian emperors directed against the Left Bloc. Now these Ukrainian SRs and SDs were leading their allies onto Ukrainian soil and showing them the shortest and most practical routes towards the Dnieper and the Revolutionary Front.

To the agents of the Left Bloc regime there was a choice: either abandon the textile shipment somewhere on the railway, thus leaving it to the new authorities who would receive their marching orders from the Germans and Austrians; or send it to its proper destination, thereby showing the toilers of the cities and villages that, despite the retreat and the scoundrels who were taking over, their needs still counted.

The shipment finally arrived in Gulai-Polye and was shared out according to the wishes of the inhabitants.

CHAPTER 26

New members of our Group

Towards the middle of February three sailors from the Black Sea Fleet arrived in Gulai-Polye. Two of them were peasants from Gulai-Polye, the third was a stranger to us. He was visiting with his father who served as a coachman for the pomeshchik Abraham Jantzen. All three called themselves Left SRs. Two of them, Boris Veretelnik (peasant of Gulai-Polye) and E. Polonsky (the stranger) had party membership cards from the Sevastopol Committee of the Party of Left SRs. The third, Sharovsky, also a peasant of Gulai-Polye, was not a party member.

All three from the first days of their arrival in Gulai-Polye showed up at general assemblies and made an impression as energetic revolutionary workers. That was a time when sailors were renowned as fearless defenders of the Revolution. The inhabitants of Gulai-Polye welcomed them with respect and listened to their speeches with interest.

Comrade Veretelnik was familiar to me from childhood. So when he introduced me to his two companions I had no reason not to trust them. I presented all three to the Raion Revkom in Gulai-Polye and they were admitted as members of the propaganda section of the Committee on conditions that all their agitational work in Gulai-Polye and its raion would be carried out under the banner of the Revkom. This condition was accepted by them and they settled down to work in Gulai-Polye.

The Sevastopol Committee of the Party of Left SRs summoned Veretelnik and Polonsky back to Sevastopol but I, at their request and with the consent of the A-K Group, wrote to the Sevastopol Committee in the name of the Gulai-Polye Revkom that they were needed in the village. And the Party didn't bother them any more.

Shortly after this, Comrade Veretelnik severed his connections with the Party of Left SRs and joined the Gulai-Polye A-K Group. Comrade Polonsky remained outside the Group but declared himself sympathetic to anarchism. He worked with Comrade Veretelnik and other members of the Group, taking part in all their activities in Gulai-Polye and its raion and giving an account of his work just as if he were a member.

Several times, it's true, the brother of Polonsky, a Bolshevik who belonged to the Revkom in Bolshoi Tokmak, invited our Polonsky to join him, promising him a position on the executive of the Revkom. But our Polonsky always refused, not wanting to leave Gulai-Polye where the revolutionary spirit was infectious and his organizing work gave him great satisfaction.

The strength of our group was increasing. Our revolutionary work broadened. The Group was entirely devoted to it. There was no obstacle which could prevent us from winning over the revolutionary masses intellectually and spiritually.

Always the Group was in the vanguard of the Revolution, leading the toilers in their struggle against the oppressors. In the way it operated, the Group set an example of autonomous self-activity of peasants and workers. It taught them how to be activists and saw the results being put into practice by the toilers.

CHAPTER 27

The agrarian communes – their organization – their enemies

February – March, 1918. The moment had come to distribute the livestock and implements which had been seized from the pomeshchiks in the autumn of 1917 and to organize agrarian communes on the former estates. All the toilers of the raion understood the importance of decisive action at this moment, both for the construction of a new life, and for its defense. Under the direction of the Revkom, ex-soldiers from the Front began moving all the implements and livestock from the estates of the pomeshchiks and large farms to a central holding area. Their former owners were left with two pairs of horses, one or two cows (depending on the size of the family), one plough, one seeding machine, one mower, one winnowing machine, etc. Meanwhile the peasants went to the fields to finish the division of the land begun in the fall. At the same time some peasants and workers, previously organized into agrarian communes, left their villages and, with their whole families, took possession of the former properties of the pomeshchiks. In doing so, they paid no attention to the fact that the Red Guard units of the Left Bloc, after the agreement with the emperors of Austria and Germany, had evacuated Ukraine. The remaining revolutionary military formations could offer only token resistance to the regular German and Austrian troops who were supported by the armed bands of the Central Rada.

Once the communes were set up, their members, without losing any time, began to organize themselves: some were employed in the normal springtime agricultural work, while others formed combat groups to defend the Revolution and its conquests. The same thing happened in other raions, setting an example for the whole country.

The majority of the agricultural communes were composed of peasants; a minority were a mixture of peasants and workers. Their organization was based on equality and the solidarity. All members of these communes – both men and women – brought a very positive attitude to their work, whether it was in the field or domestic work.

The communes had common kitchens and dining halls. But the wish of any members to prepare their own food for their families, or to prepare food in the communal kitchen and then carry it home, never met with any objection from the other members. Each member, or even a whole group, could organize their feeding any way they wished, on condition, however, that they give advance notice to the other members so the appropriate dispositions could be made in the communal kitchen and pantry.

The members of a commune were also required to get up early to tend to the cattle and horses and take care of other domestic chores.

Members of the commune had the right to absent themselves, but they were required to advise their work partner in advance so a replacement could be found. This applied to normal work days. On days of rest (Sundays) members took turns going on excursions.

The program of work of the whole commune was worked out during meetings of all the members. Each of the members knew exactly what was expected from them.

Only the question of schools remained open, because the communes did not want to re-establish schools of the former type; among the new schools the first choice was the anarchist model of F. Ferrer[13] which was well known to the communes because of the activities of the A-K Group which distributed brochures on the subject. But people trained in the methods of this school were lacking and the communes

13 Francisco Ferrer (1859-1909) was a Spanish educational innovator who designed schools where there was no atmosphere of competition, coercion, or humiliation.

tried to recruit them from the cities, through the intermediary of the A-K Group. If this proved impossible, it was decided, at least for the first year, to get people who were simply able to teach the school subjects.

There existed within a seven or eight kilometre radius from Gulai-Polye four of these communes. There were many others in the raion. If I dwell on these four, it is because I organized them personally. Their first initiative took place under my supervision, and all the important questions were always submitted to me for advice.

As a member of one of these communes, probably the largest one, I helped out two days a week in all facets of the operation: in the springtime in the fields behind the bukker[14] or the seeding machine; before and after the seeding I did other types of farm work or helped the mechanic at the electric station.

The remaining four days of the week I worked in Gulai-Polye, in the A-K Group or the raion Revkom. This work regime was expected of me by the Group and all the communes and lasted until the defense of the Revolution required the mobilizing of all available forces. For, advancing from the west was the Counter-Revolution in the form of the German and Austro-Hungarian imperial armies and the Central Rada.

In all the communes there were peasant anarchists, but the majority of their members were not anarchists. However the internal life of the commune was a model of anarchist solidarity. In today's world, only the simple natures of toilers not yet affected by the poisonous atmosphere of the cities are capable of such spontaneous solidarity. The cities always emanate an odour of lies and betrayal which infect even many so-called anarchists.

Each commune was composed of a dozen families of peasants and workers, reaching a size of 100, 200, or even 300

14 The bukker was a plough with three or four shares invented by Mennonite colonists.

members. Each commune received from former estates of pomeshechiks, by the decision of the Raion Congress of Land Committees, a quantity of land which it would be able to farm with its own labour. Moreover, the communes received the livestock and machinery which were already on the property.

And the free toilers of the communes set to work, singing happy songs as they did so. Their songs reflected the spirit of the Revolution, the spirit of those warriors who propagated revolution for many years and had perished or remained alive and implacable in the struggle for "higher justice" which must triumph over injustice, a struggle which must intensify and become a beacon for all humanity.

The toilers sowed the fields and worked in the vegetable gardens, full of confidence in themselves and in their strong resolution to not allow the former proprietors to recover lands which they had never worked with their own hands, lands which the proprietors had possessed by the authority of the State and which they were attempting to seize again.

The inhabitants of the villages and hamlets adjacent to these communes often had a lower level of political consciousness and were not yet completely liberated from sucking up to the "kulaks". These people envied the communards and frequently expressed the desire to confiscate the livestock and machinery left by the pomeshchiks and divide them up among themselves.

"The communards could always buy them back from us later, if they want to," they said. But this attitude was severely condemned by a vast majority of the toilers at congresses and other meetings. The majority of the labouring population saw the organizing of agricultural communes as the healthy beginning of a new social life which, as the Revolution approached the culmination of its creative phase, would grow and develop and stimulate similar phenomena throughout the whole country, or at least in all the villages and hamlets

of the raion.

The structure of the free communes was considered by the toilers as the most advanced form of a just society. Nevertheless, most of the toilers decided not to join communes at that time because of the approach of German-Austrian troops, their own lack of organization, and their inability to defend the new system against both "revolutionary" and counter-revolutionary authorities.

That's why the revolutionary toilers of the raion contented themselves with trying to support in every way those among them – the boldest ones – who had organized themselves into free agrarian communes on the former properties of the pomeshchiks and were leading an independent life there on new social bases.

A certain number of the pomeshchiks and kulaks, as well as some of the German colonists, realized that one way or another they could not continue as owners of thousands of dessyatins of land, exploiting the work of others. Without hesitating any longer, they sided with the Revolution and organized their lives on a new basis, i.e. without using batrak labour and without enjoying the right to rent out their land.

However, at the moment when the oppressed were seized with joy everywhere on liberated soil; when the toilers, oppressed and degraded by political, economic, and social inequality, began to be conscious of their own slavery and sought to be rid of this disgrace once and for all; when it seemed that this liberation was on the point of being accomplished, for the toilers had already become the direct exponents of this concept; when the ideas of freedom, equality, and solidarity among the people began gradually to permeate their lives and simultaneously stifle any possibility of the rebirth of a new slavery; – at this moment, the mouthpieces of the ruling Left Bloc, guided by the crafty Lenin, furiously peddled the notion that Lenin's government controlled the Revolution

and that everyone must submit to this government as the only repository of the people's secular desires – freedom, equality, and free labour.

The urge to dominate the people and their thoughts, and the great Russian Revolution which they had created, so befuddled the state socialists that they forgot for the moment their fundamental divergences on the Peace of Brest-Litovsk, a peace concluded with the German and Austro-Hungarian "tsars" which was regarded by the revolutionary population with hostility. This fundamental problem, with its stormy discussions, the state socialists neglected for the moment. Now another thorny problem had risen up before them. How, while remaining the originators and leaders of the Revolution in the eyes of the revolutionary masses, could they manage to distort the very essence of the concept of social revolution without being destroyed when their secret intentions were exposed? Their intentions were to divert the Revolution from the path of autonomous, creative action and subject it entirely to the statist doctrines following from the resolutions and directives of the Central Executive Committee and the government.

It was quite obvious that within the framework envisaged by the Left Bloc for the Great Russian Revolution there was no place either for autonomous agricultural communes or artels, organized freely on conquered territory without the approval of the government; or for the direct, independent take-over by the workers of factories, workshops, printing plants, and other public enterprises.

The direct actions of the toilers during the Great Russian Revolution clearly reflected their anarchist tendencies. And it was these tendencies which alarmed the state socialists of the Left the most, because the toilers of the cities and villages were pulling themselves together and preparing to launch an anarchist movement which would attack the very idea of the State, in order to recover the State's chief functions and turn

them over to their own local autonomous organs.

By their direct revolutionary acts, the toilers showed great daring in their quest for self-liberation. Even if they were imperfectly organized, at least they acted tenaciously.

If the toilers of the cities and villages had received effective organizational assistance from revolutionary anarchists, they would have been able to achieve their aspirations and would drawn all the active forces of the Revolution to their side. And this would have put an end to the irresponsible and incoherent actions of the new socialist rulers who, with Lenin, Ustinov[15] and Co. in command, tried to impose itself on the mass of workers. And the abominable terror of the Bolsheviks, directed against humanity in general and against those who kept their personal convictions and were not afraid to criticize the Bolsheviks and their so-called "proletarian" government in particular, would not have existed in Russia or in Ukraine nor in the other Bolshevik republics.

Alas! We, the revolutionary anarchists, were never capable of seizing the initiative in the midst of great popular revolutionary actions, of understanding their significance and how to help them develop even further. And now we remained powerless, simply because of the lack of even the most rudimentary organization during the most decisive days of the Revolution.

The left-wing state-socialists, on the contrary, while they could not embrace completely the direct revolutionary actions of the toilers, at least quickly understood them and realized that, from the point of view of their ideology, it was impossible to support these popular actions because this would be the end of their illusions of power and would drag them down from the summits of the State which these new masters had attained by climbing on the backs of the direct defenders of the Revolution. The statist Bolsheviks and Left SRs hastened to move against these direct popular revolution-

15 A. M. Ustinov was a Left SR on the Central Executive Committee (chaired by Lenin).

ary actions. That is, they not only allowed the government of Lenin to restrain the revolutionary toilers of the cities and villages by decrees handed down from the top, but personally contributed to the disorganization of the toilers at the moment when they had succeeded for the first time in grouping their revolutionary forces effectively. These left-wing parties restrained the process of destruction, and thus the Revolution could not attain its ultimate phase in which the process of reconstruction could find its point of departure and acquire its full development. The new society opposes itself to all that was old and rotten in the former society and which is quite useless in a healthy human society. But always, in times of wholesale psychological changes in the population, the old system tends, under the most varied aspects and forms, hastily and superficially camouflaged, to find its place in the new, free social formations.

These left-wing state socialists, profiting from the naive trust of the peoples of Russia, Ukraine, and other regions in their revolutionary work, abused this trust. With their notion of a socialist, proletarian state, they caused the people to swerve off the path of widening and intensifying the Revolution and brought disorganization into the nascent free society, distorting its individual and social tendencies and slowing down the process of its realization. It was this fact, and none other, which gave rise to weariness and indifference on the part of the partisans of liberation, while their enemies, regaining their composure, began to organize themselves and to act while taking into account the relative strengths of the revolutionary and counter-revolutionary forces.

Such moments are advantageous for the new revolutionary forces because they can easily subdue the revolutionary toilers, this devoted vanguard of the Revolution, and separate them from the revolutionary front, broad and creative, which develops outside the control of the authorities. It is precisely under such conditions that the Ukrainian toilers were removed from the revolutionary front.

The politics of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with the German and Austro-Hungarian emperors contributed in no small measure to this situation. It should be noted that the Left SRs protested vigorously against this treaty. But, being allied with the Bolsheviks in the business of deceiving and enslaving the toilers for the supposed purpose of constructing a new society in the name of the Revolution, the Left SRs submitted to a fait accompli. Along with the Bolsheviks, they withdrew all their Red Guard detachments from Ukraine in accord with the Treaty. Almost no resistance was offered to the counter-revolutionary forces of Germany and Austro-Hungarian or to the detachments of the Central Rada.

As for the revolutionary Ukrainian toilers, they were left, for the most part, totally at the mercy of the hangmen of the Revolution, invading from the west. The revolutionary commanders either took all the weapons with them, or abandoned them to the invaders.

It's true that the retreat of the revolutionary forces of the Bolsheviks and Left SRs went on for months. During this time, those commanders who had not yet been affected by the poison of these political parties did whatever they could to arm the revolutionary population of Ukraine. But the circumstances were quite unfavourable. The armies were retreating, which is why all the weapons could not be transferred to the revolutionary population and used by them against the advancing counter-revolutionary armies. The retreat of the Red Guards was transformed, indeed, into a veritable rout and the revolutionary territories abandoned were most often occupied the same day by the counter-revolutionary forces, so the revolutionary population had no time to organize themselves into combat units to repulse the invaders.

CHAPTER 28

The successes of the German-Austrian armies and the Ukrainian Central Rada against the Revolution – Agents of the Counter-Revolution and the struggle against them

In March, 1918 the city of Kiev and most of Right Bank Ukraine was occupied by expeditionary armies of the imperial German and Austro-Hungarian empires. After reaching an agreement with the Central Rada, directed by Ukrainian socialists under the presidency of the ancient SR Professor M. Hrushevsky[14], these armies entered Ukrainian territory and began a vile attack against the Revolution.

With the direct assistance of the Central Rada and its agents, the German and Austro-Hungarian command extended a network of counter-revolutionary espionage over the whole Ukraine. While the expeditionary armies and the troops of the Central Rada were still on the right bank of the Dnieper, the Left Bank part of Ukraine was already infested with their numerous agents, spies, and provocateurs.

During this period, not a day passed in Gulai-Polye itself, or in its raion, without some meeting where there was an attempt to induce the toilers to repudiate the Revolution for the benefit of the counter-revolution.

This infiltration by spies and provocateurs of the most revolutionary part of Ukraine, namely the Left Bank region, had the logical effect of uniting all the Ukrainian chauvinists of Gulai-Polye into a "revolutionary" organization which labelled itself as "socialist-revolutionary". At the head of this organization stood the agronomist Dmitrenko, P. Semeniuta-Riabko, A. Volokh, Volkov, and Prekhodko. These last four

14 Michael Hrushevsky was actually 52 at the time.

were lieutenants. Most of them were owners of large estates and one of them, Volkov, owned a dry goods store.

These landowner-lieutenants had long regarded the work of the Revolution with anger and spite, for it deprived them of their lands to the benefit of the community as a whole. However, they called themselves revolutionaries and under this phoney label they engaged in a struggle against the activities of the Revkom, the Soviet, and the Land Committee. When they had convinced themselves that the ideological inspiration behind these revolutionary entities, as well as the initiator of solutions to the agrarian and social-political questions for the whole raion, was the A-K Group, they tried, first behind the scenes and then openly, to accuse anarchists generally and the A-K Group in particular of being "thieves" and "bandits" who did not respect "either the laws of the Revolution or the limits which cannot be exceeded".

These "revolutionaries" cited as an example other raions where the anarchists had not penetrated the ranks of the toilers and where the population did not try to resolve the land question without permission from the Provisional Government, up to the moment when the new government took over, "the government of Bolshevik-bandits"! – whined these 'revolutionaries'.

"While here, in Gulai-Polye, and in the neighbouring raions," said these characters, "this question was resolved by brigandage starting in 1917. And all thanks to the anarchists."

Such accusations against the anarchists by people covering themselves with the banner of socialism diminished only themselves and their ideas.

The Gulai-Polye peasants had organizational connections with the anarchists that went back 11 years during most of which the anarchists had to live an underground existence. And during the past year the peasants had seen the anarchists openly in the vanguard of the Revolution and were convinced

that the anarchists would always be on the right road with them. So the peasants hissed these newly minted "revolutionaries" when they gratuitously insulted the anarchist by comparing them with thieves and bandits.

As for the anarchists, they could only point out the work they had accomplished, along with the toilers, in the previous months including setting up the agrarian communes on the former properties of the pomeshchiks.

And the village toilers, recognizing that the anarchists were correct in their understanding of the meaning of the Revolution and of the rights of the toilers to liberate themselves entirely from all the bonds of slavery, continued to engage in revolutionary work themselves, despite all the traps set for them by their enemies.

Equality, freedom to think for yourself, and independence for each and everyone in Gulai-Polye and its raion led to the following results: the workers acquired self-esteem and began to understand their place in life and in the struggle against their oppressors, whether from the Right or from the Left. This healthy course of the toilers to affirm their rights to liberty and independence worried the statists who, frightened at the idea of seeing their authoritarian principles go down the drain, began to take action against the toilers and spared none of the means at their disposal.

At the moment when the Ukrainian nationalist "revolutionary" organization of Gulai-Polye unleashed their dirty campaign against the anarchists, the victorious advance of the counter-revolutionary German and Austro-Hungarian armies, preceded by detachments of the also counter-revolutionary Central Rada, had already crushed the Revolution in Right-Bank Ukraine. The Revolution there was rendered defenseless by the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk concluded between the Bolshevik Party and the titular heads of these armies, Wilhelm of Germany and Karl of Austria-Hungary. I really don't know if the Ukrainian socialist-chauvinists, who had

agreed to an alliance with foreign tsars against the popular Revolution were even aware how odious their action was towards the Revolution. But their followers, the rank-in-file nationalists, certainly knew it because they clung to this shameful alliance and the armed support it provided them as a unique means to liberate Ukraine from the Revolution and re-establish the rule of the pomeshchiks.

Every day at their meetings the socialist "revolutionary" nationalists of Gulai-Polye bragged that the counter-revolutionary armies of the Germans and Austro-Hungarians and the counter-revolutionary detachments of the Central Rada were smashing and crushing all the living forces of the Revolution as they advanced. Now the revolutionary toilers believed in freedom of speech and the inalienable right to have one's own opinions, so the "revolutionary" socialists were not restrained from spreading their odious propaganda. In fact they felt encouraged to organize a General Assembly of the toilers of Gulai-Polye.

This Assembly promised to be most interesting. The organizers had posed the following question: who are the toilers of Gulai-Polye who support the Central Rada [and consequently German and Austro-Hungarian militarists who were leading a 600,000 strong army against the Revolution], and who were the toilers who were against the Central Rada? And if against, under which banner did they march?

All the speakers competed in seeing how low they could stoop. The lied shamelessly. For "Mother Ukraine" and her independent government, her prisons, her jailers, and her executioners, everything must submit without resistance: the Revolution and liberty, and the toilers of the cities and villages who, advancing in the front line of the Revolution had adopted its best goals and worked to develop them.

"In the contrary case, in the case of resistance," said the socialist-chauvinist orators, "we shall exterminate everything by force, assisted by our allies, by our brothers. [They meant

Wilhelm II of Germany and Karl of Austria-Hungary with their armies.]

"Those who do not resist the powerful armies of our allies will receive from the German command, through the intermediary of the Central Rada, sugar, cloth, and shoes from the thousands of trains which are following them." [There was a great shortage of these items at that moment.]

"But for those who resist, they will be no mercy! Entire villages and towns will be destroyed by fire; the populations will be lead into captivity and one prisoner in ten will be shot.

"And the others? The others, for their treason, will receive a terrible punishment from their own Ukrainian brothers... "

Upon hearing these declarations, I spoke up and requested that all the speakers belonging to the Party which organized the meeting be prepared to back up their claims with verifiable data.

Next I addressed a few words to the citizens present on the statements presented by the speakers about the shameful alliance of the Central Rada with the emperors and drew some conclusions from what had been said by these speakers and by their opponents.

And the meeting concluded on a note of disapproval of the speakers and all the ideas they advanced before the mass of toilers present. A resolution was passed by an overwhelming majority calling on all the toilers to support active armed struggle against the Central Rada and the counter-revolutionary German and Austro-Hungarian armies.

This resolution did not satisfy the organizers of the meeting. They asked the assembly to be specific: under what banner would this struggle be led against the Central Rada and its allies who had "fraternally extended a hand to help save Ukraine"?

The assembly responded to their demand. It voted and, as a

result, divided into three groups. One group threw their lot in with the organizers of the meeting, i.e. the Central Rada; another rallied around the Left SR Mirgorodsky; and the third remained loyal to the A-K Group of Gulai-Polye.

During the attempt to count the members of each group, Mirgorodsky's bunch fused with the organizers of the meeting. It was hard to understand the role of the Left SR Mirgorodsky in this situation. We tried to question his behaviour, but he couldn't come up with a satisfactory answer. He realized the error of his jesuitical manoeuvre only after the meeting.

Despite the fusion of the two groups, the supporters of the Central Rada still found themselves in an absolute minority. The resolution voted by the citizens present was ratified by them and there were further put-downs of the Central Rada and the foreign armies which were marching with it.

Then the leader of the Ukrainian nationalist organization – which called itself socialist-revolutionary – the sub-lieutenant Paul Semeniuta-Riabko, mounted the tribune and in a warlike voice announced to the toilers:

"Never mind! You'll be sorry some day. But there won't be forgiveness for all, especially not for the anarchists! The hour is fast approaching when our army will enter Gulai-Polye. We'll deal with you then. Remember, our allies, the Germans, are powerful! They will help us re-establish order in the country and you won't be seeing any more anarchists around here!"

These hysterical utterings and threats roused the indignation of all the toilers. The anarchist peasants of Gulai-Polye immediately spoke up and declared that they accepted the challenge of sub-lieutenant Semeniuta-Riabko. "But we ask," said one of the anarchists, "that sub-lieutenant Semeniuta-Riabko give details about what's going to happen when the Germans arrive in Gulai-Polye."

Then sub-lieutenant Semeniuta-Riabko provided those de-

tails: "The Germans will help the Central Rada impose its laws on the country and re-establish order which means that the anarchists will be imprisoned. You can preach your ideas in prison!" he cried, carried away with his anger.

In the audience some voices were raised: "Throw him out!" "Beat him up!"

The anarchists again delegated one of their members to declare to everyone present that it was now perfectly clear to them that the Ukrainian nationalist organization was counting on the arrival in Gulai-Polye of the counter-revolutionary German armies. With the help of this brutal force, the nationalists were promising to "punish" the Revolution.

"No, not the Revolution, just the Bolsheviks and the anarchists," replied a voice from the group of the Ukrainian nationalist SRs, standing around their leader, sub-lieutenant Semeniuta-Riabko.

"Very well! Then be aware, gentlemen nationalists, that we anarchists will respond to your vile challenge!" declared the secretary of the A-K Group.

With these words the meeting came to an end. The toilers of Gulai-Polye, outraged by the threats of Semeniuta-Riabko, went home angry and insulted.

The supporters of Semeniuta-Riabko surrounded him and, encouraged by their leader's laughter, made nasty comments to the toilers who were leaving: "Go on home! We're going to wait for the response of the anarchists... ."

Three or four hours after the meeting I submitted officially to the Revkom on behalf of the A-K Group the following question: "How does the Revkom, as the organizer of revolutionary unity and solidarity in the work of defending the Revolution, regard the threat addressed to the anarchists by the Ukrainian nationalist organization? Does the Revkom think it ought to do something about this threat, or not?"

The Revkom studied this question the very same day and responded to the A-K Group that it placed no political importance on the threats of the leader of the Ukrainian nationalist "socialists", sub-lieutenant Semeniuta-Riabko, directed at the anarchists. The organization of nationalists was in essence not revolutionary, and its vacuous and irresponsible chatter could do nothing to harm the work of the Revolution.

Nevertheless, the A-K Group did not agree with the Revkom's position regarding the clearly counter-revolutionary threats of the nationalists and declared a second time, in a note addressed to the Revkom, that it was a mistake to tolerate opinions contrary to the principles of revolutionary solidarity. The note demanded that the Revkom publish an appeal to the population, condemning in no uncertain terms the counter-revolutionary organization of the nationalist-socialists and their threats against the anarchists and the anarchist ideal specifically.

The A-K Group declared if the Revkom did not act in this matter, it would be obliged to recall its members from the Revkom and could no longer support it in any fashion in the future.

As I recall, several members of the Revkom asked me if I agreed with the demands of the Group and if I would submit to its decision if it recalled its members from the Revkom. I responded that the demands of the A-K Group were justified and that, although I was not a delegate from the Group but rather from the Soviet, I intended to respect the decision of the Group and act accordingly. Then the members of the Revkom decided unanimously, without discussion, to review the two notes of the A-K Group again and summon the leaders of the Ukrainian nationalist organization to try to smooth over the conflict which had arisen between them and the anarchists.

But it was already too late...

The A-K Group made the Revkom aware that it had declared terror against all those who dared, now or in the future (in the case of victory of the Counter-Revolution over the Revolution), to persecute the anarchist ideal or its anonymous adherents. The first act in this campaign was the execution of Semeniuta-Riabko, an act which had already been carried out by members of the Group.

Actually, Semeniuta-Riabko had been killed around the same time the A-K Group made its declaration to the Revkom. The Group had not received a timely answer from the Revkom to their second note and took matters into its own hands. The news of this execution made a very strong impression on the Revkom. Its members were shook up – they could neither act nor speak and appeared completely stunned as the representatives of the Group calmly dealt with current business.

The next day, around 10 a.m., a delegation from the organization of Ukrainian nationalists arrived at the Revkom and consulted with me, requesting my intervention in the conflict between their Ukrainian Organization (UO) (they didn't call themselves nationalists) and the A-K Group.

When I passed this information on to the members of the Revkom, they totally refused to examine this affair, declaring that Semeniuta-Riabko, dazzled by the success of the counter-revolutionary Austro-German armies, lost his senses which prevented him from understanding that the Revolution was not yet beaten and was still capable of striking back at its enemies.

Threatening the anarchists with the arrival of counter-revolutionary troops and prison was a flagrant act of injustice towards the Revolution, the Revolution which almost the entire population supported. The killing of the person who made this threat and boasted of a Counter-Revolution supported by the bayonets of the emperors' armies and the Central Rada, was an act in defense of the Revolution.

But it came too late. The anarchists should have killed him the moment this counter-revolutionary had threatened them in saying that as soon as his German and Austro-Hungarian friends showed up, he would make it his business to see that the anarchists were locked up.

"Since the leader of the Ukrainian nationalist organization was an enemy of the Revolution," declared the members of the Revkom, "we consider it quite inadmissible to concern ourselves with this incident and to have it mentioned in the minutes of our meetings.

"With the knowledge and approval of his organization, sub-lieutenant Semeniuta-Riabko uttered a vicious threat against the anarchists; it thus belongs to this organization to straighten out this matter, to withdraw the threat and carefully redefine its socio-political position with regard to the Revolution. Only then can the UO be admitted to the Revkom and avoid similar conflicts in the future."

The delegation left the Revkom and returned to its comrades, bearing the censure of the Revokom against the whole UO.

I must say that personally I did not approve of this response, but I couldn't protest while the delegation was present. Only after it had left did I affirm once more that the Revkom stood for revolutionary unity and solidarity. As such it should be prepared to enter into negotiations with organizations which requested its intervention in cases where errors of judgement had occurred, errors which could provoke conflicts like the one created by the UO which had led to the death of its leader.

Already when the A-K Group first approached the Revkom about the threat against the anarchists, I had said that it was necessary to intervene in this conflict. But the majority of members of the Revkom had objected, claiming that if the Revkom stayed out it the whole thing would blow over and be forgotten.

Now I repeated again: if the Revkom had reacted right away to my desire to maintain the revolutionary honour of the Group of which I was a member, the Group which had close ideological ties with the Revkom in the defense and development of the Revolution, it is entirely possible that the Group would not have killed the agent of the counter-revolutionary Central Rada.

"It's true that it's too late to do anything now," I said to my comrades on the Revkom, "but it's not too late to act to avoid retaliatory assassinations on the part of the nationalists which – I must declare it openly – will unleash terror against all those who – consciously or just through stupidity – have become agents of the dirty work of the Central Rada and its German allies."

At this same meeting, the Revkom designated three of its members: Moise Kalinichenko, Paul Sokruta, and myself, who were to form a commission with the nationalists to find a way to avoid killings by either side.

Representing the chauvinists on the commission was a certain Dmitrenko, a convinced SR, who was president of the Prosvita organization.

The A-K Group was represented by its secretary, A. Kalachnikov.

After some discussion, it appeared that the Ukrainian Organization disassociated itself entirely from the threat addressed by Semeniuta-Riabko to the anarchists.

The representative of the UO, Dmitrenko, declared that Semeniuta-Riabko's threat could be explained by his boundless enthusiasm and empathy for the suffering of his people. The UO disapproved of this threat and considered it in contradiction with its ideas.

But Dmitrenko was not sincere. His declaration was only a political manoeuvre on the part of the UO.

We understood this, and Comrade Kalashnikov replied that "We see in this threat the desire of the whole UO to attack the anarchists for their tenacious struggle against the invasion of revolutionary territory by the counter-revolutionary armies of the German and Austro-Hungarian emperors and the troops of the Central Rada."

"The A-K Group believed it had a duty to kill the instigator of this enterprise directed against the anarchists and against their ideas. The Group killed him and is prepared in the future to kill any scoundrels like him."

After this I went to a meeting of the A-K Group where I asked the comrades to renounce terror, but my view was attacked by a whole bunch of them. They viewed my appeal as a defense of the agents of the Counter-Revolution and they scoffed at me, not holding anything back.

I found their audacity irritating, but I was also glad to see that I didn't intimidate them and began to feel more strongly that my work among the younger members of the Group had not been in vain.

In spite of the ridicule, my considerations for and against terror were ultimately adopted by the Group as the basis on which to review its declaration of terror and, after a series of meetings and serious discussions among the comrades, the Group renounced its previous resolution and recorded in the minutes that so long as the enemies of the Revolution restricted themselves to verbal attacks without taking up arms, terrorist acts would not be applied against them.

The younger members of the Group had a lot of trouble understanding this decision and more than once they suggested that "Comrade Makhno wants to convert the most hidebound counter-revolutionaries into revolutionaries. Comrade Makhno has thereby delivered a heavy blow to the unity of the Group", etc.

However the moment was such that no one wanted to desert

the Group. For it was the moment when the Counter-Revolution, borne on the bayonets of the German armies, clearly had the upper hand over the defenders of the Revolution which consisted of a few isolated units of Red Guards. Consequently, for a raion like Gulai-Polye which could mobilize significant forces for the defense of the Revolution, we needed to pursue a different set of tactics. We needed to push strongly for peace between the different parties, for equality and toleration of different revolutionary opinions, because Gulai-Polye was becoming the centre of the spiritual and military forces which could save the Revolution.

That's why I didn't pay much attention to the naive protests of my young friends. I was confronted with the huge problem of organizing battalions of volunteers to fight the Central Rada and its allies, the German and Austro-Hungarian armies, 600,000 strong.

I felt that the Revkom had been negligent in this area of its work and insisted that all the detachments in the raion which were under the control of the Revkom should be organized as battalions with a complement of 1,500 soldiers each.

The A-K Group, in my opinion, had to set an example in this domain just as it had in its other revolutionary work. Otherwise it would trail behind the revolutionary events. It would separate itself from the toilers of the oppressed villages and would be reduced to the level of hundreds of other anarchist groups in Russia which had no influence on the ideas which guided the masses of toilers who had faith in the Revolution but were not able on their own to define its essential core and defend it from the distortions of the chiefs of political socialism.

The Group took this circumstance into consideration and showed militant qualities of the first order in organizing armed forces for the defense of the Revolution.

Other groups in the cities and villages of other raions wasted

time in fruitless discussions, along the lines of: "Is it really anarchist for an anarchist group to create revolutionary combat units? Would it not be preferable for such groups to distance themselves from such activity, contenting themselves with not preventing their members from participating in this 'semi-anarchist' work?"

The peasant A-K Group of Gulai-Polye advanced the following credo:

"Revolutionary toilers, form battalions of volunteers to save the Revolution! The state socialists have betrayed the Revolution in Ukraine and are leading the black forces of reaction from foreign countries! In order to counter this attack an immense force of revolutionary toilers is necessary. The revolutionary toilers will find the necessary strength by forming these battalions of volunteers and will triumph over the intrigues of their enemies, both of the right and of the left!"

The Revkom and all the soviets of the raion took up this credo and promoted it actively.

There were, to be sure, especially among the tribe of Ukrainian nationalists, individuals who opposed this credo. But the discussions on this question were conducted in a more civilized fashion. There were no references to the bayonets of the German and Austro-Hungarian counter-revolutionary armies and no threats of reprisals against the opponents of the criminal politics of the Central Rada. Now even the nationalists seemed to realize that the politics of the Central Rada was directed against the Ukrainian working people and their revolutionary conquests. The Ukrainian toilers were asserting themselves ever more freely and clearly in overcoming the most formidable obstacles raised against them by their enemies on the path of Revolution. These enemies were: on the Right – the bourgeoisie; on the Left – the state socialists who sought to take advantage of the situation to give a false interpretation of the goals of the Revolution and thereby subjugate the Revolution entirely to the needs of the state.

It was a very heavy situation. All of us, members of the A-K Group and the revolutionary peasant worker organizations, felt it. And then a scandal broke out which involved the Union of Metal and Carpentry Workers. The executive of this union demanded that the A-K Group and the Soviet recall Comrade Lev Schneider from the Provincial Soviet.

This demand was motivated by the fact that Comrade Schneider had not fulfilled his mandate; consequently, the factories and mills of Gulai-Polye, as well as the blacksmith shops, locksmith shops, and other workshops were receiving little or no iron, steel, coal, and other raw materials which they required.

Confronted with this criticism of its responsible representative, the A-K Group, after conferring with the Soviet, recalled Lev Schneider to Gulai-Polye so that he could explain the reasons which prevented him from fulfilling his mandate.

But, Comrade Schneider had already contracted the disease of carelessness and irresponsibility which infected certain of our anarchist comrades in the cities. He responded that he couldn't return to Gulai-Polye as he was too burdened, so he said, with tasks assigned to him by the Provincial Soviet. He invited the A-K Group to nominate another representative in his place.

Such an attitude towards the organizing the toilers of the whole raion on the part of a member of the A-K Group and someone who was respected by the toilers, incited the Group to sent him an urgent telegram demanding his immediate return to Gulai-Polye, where he would have to answer to the A-K Group, the Soviet, and the Trade Union. If he refused to come, the Group would be obliged to send two comrades to fetch him.

Comrade Schneider knew that this was not an idle threat and that the A-K Group would shortly track him down and arrest him for having compromised the Group before the Soviet and

the Trade Union and, consequently, before all the toilers. He could very well end up being shot.

Two days after receiving this terse telegram, Comrade Schneider turned up in Gulai-Polye and made his report to the Soviet and to the Group. His mandate was withdrawn and Comrade Schneider went back to the Kerner factory to run his lathe again.

While the Group was occupied with sorting out this case, the agents of the Central Rada and their German allies were not losing any time. They seized on the case of Lev Schneider and harped on it at meetings of the toilers.

It was necessary to fight stubbornly against the slanders. We had to go to all the villages and hamlets and be present at all the meetings organized by the agents of the Rada or of General Eichorn. This took up a lot of our time and kept some our best comrades from the most pressing working of our Group – the creation of an armed front against the Counter-Revolution.

CHAPTER 29

Consolidation of the detachments – formation of a single Front with the Left Bloc

Things were happening fast. The German and Austro-Hungarian armies, led by General Eichorn, were already approaching Yekaterinoslav; from another direction shells were fired on Alexandrovsk from near the Kichkass Bridge, about 80 kilometres from Gulai-Polye.

Opposing them were the Red Guard detachments commanded by General Yegorov as well as numerous independent detachments which received weapons and ammunition from Yegorov and the chief of the reserve Red Army of the "South of Russia" Belenkevich. These autonomous units acted at their own risk and peril – most often in sectors where there were no enemies. These forces were recalled urgently from Crimea to the region of Verkhnii Tokmak and Pologi. But there was no longer any question of disembarking these troops from their echelons. They had been withdrawn from the Front too soon, which had clearly influenced their fighting spirit. They now talked only of getting as far as possible from the Front, to branch stations such as Yesinovataya or Yelovaysk. In reality, two days later these forces were pushed forward to meet the enemy forces which, incidentally, were still on the right bank of the Dnieper.

Some of the independent detachments and a group of Left Bloc soldiers heroically repulsed the attempts of the enemy to cross the Dnieper. But there was considerable attrition in the defending forces due to exhaustion and a shortage of ammunition. This gave rise to increasing anxiety in Gulai-Polye and the neighbouring raions.

The agents of the Counter-Revolution raised their heads a

little higher and spoke more confidently against the Soviets, against the Revolution, and against the toilers who saw in the Revolution their own emancipation and therefore put everything into furthering its development.

This circumstance had a dolorous effect on the toilers. In numerous hamlets and villages confusion reigned as it always does when the masses are not kept informed in a timely fashion about the position occupied by their revolutionary vanguard.

The confusion which reigned in the raion gave rise to weakness and hesitation even in Gulai-Polye. Meetings of the Soviet, the Professional Union, the Revkom, and the A-K Group went on night and day. All the representatives of these organizations asked me for advice and insisted that I tell them what they should do.

In this grave situation I could only tell them to pull themselves together and oppose the Counter-Revolution with actions which were as energetic and resolute as their words.

I insisted to the representatives at an emergency meeting on the necessity of immediately issuing an appeal in the name of the various organizations which they represented, explaining to the toilers of the raion the real state of the Revolution and what they had to do to save it. It would invite the toilers to organize armed resistance against the phoney liberation promised by the Central Rada and the German armies.

The whole population of the raion responded to this appeal. Everywhere young people and seniors flocked to their local soviets in order to enlist and immediately form volunteer battalions. The inhabitants of Gulai-Polye itself formed a battalion comprised of six companies with 200 to 220 persons each.

The Jewish population furnished a company also as part of the Gulai-Polye battalion. The A-K Group formed a detachment from its members and candidate members. This detach-

ments was composed of several hundred persons armed with rifles, revolvers, and sabers. About half of them had horses and saddles. This detachment was put at the disposition of the Revkom.

The intelligentsia of Gulai-Polye, on the initiative of the very well-respected doctor Abraham Isakovich Loss, organized medical units, improvised field hospitals, and handed out job assignments for the medical service required by the Revolutionary Front.

Meanwhile I went to Pologi for a day to the headquarters of the commander of the reserve Red Army of the "South of Russia" Belenkevich. I informed him of the current goals of the Gulai-Polye Revkom and brought him up to date on our organization in defense of the Revolution which was the number one priority of the Revkom and the A-K Group.

Comrade Belenkevich showed great interest in what I told him and promised to go to Gulai-Polye the next day to see what he could do to help the Revkom and the A-K Group. But I wasn't satisfied with this promise. I insisted that Comrade Belenkevich give me his answer immediately: could he supply weapons to the volunteers in Gulai-Polye?

Seeing my impatience to resolve this question as quickly as possible, Comrade Belenkevich returned with me that very day to Gulai-Polye.

He was thus able to verify what I had told him and promised the Revkom that as soon as he got back to Pologi he would confer with his staff and let us know what the reserve Red Army could do to help revolutionary Gulai-Polye.

In returning from Gulai-Polye to Polgi I got Comrade Belenkevich to visit Commune #1 and led him to the fields where the free "communards" were working. He watched them work, asked them why they had adopted this way of life, and was profoundly moved.

In walking from the fields to the dining hall of the commune for the evening meal, Belenkevich shook my hand and said: "I felt, from the moment I first met you, great confidence in you, Comrade Makhno, and I say to you right now: send your people this very night to my headquarters and they will receive the rifles, machine guns, and other weapons needed by your battalion in Gulai-Polye."

This promise by Comrade Belenkevich pleased me and I immediately phoned Comrade Polonski, commander of the battalion of volunteers of Gulai-Polye, and Comrade Marchenko, member of the Revkom, and told them to go to Pologi and get the weapons and ammunition from Belenkevich's headquarters and transport them to Gulai-Polye.

As we parted, Comrade Belenkevich and I promised to help each other in revolutionary endeavours. He promised, in the case of retreat, to make available to the "communards" some echelons so they could be evacuated in time.

So passed these troubled days...

On the next day I went with several artillery specialists to the Gulai-Polye railway station to inspect what we had received from Belenkevich's headquarters. We saw six cannons (four of the French kind and two Russian howitzers), three thousand rifles, two wagons of cartridges, and nine wagons of ammunition for the cannons.

Our joy was indescribable. We immediately transported what was urgently needed to the Revkom for distribution to the companies. Then we prepared to leave for the front to fight the Central Rada and its allies, the German and Austro-Hungarian emperors.

The appeal launched by the Revkom of Gulai-Polye, the Soviet, and the A-K Group, inviting the toilers of the raion to quickly form battalions of volunteers to fight the counter-revolutionaries, came to the attention of the headquarters of the Red Guards who immediately sent by special train an

envoy to meet with me and find out what forces the Revkom of our proud raion could muster and when these troops, inspired by anarchist ideals, could be sent to the front.

I met with with him on the night of April 8, 1918, at the same moment when Lenin and Trotsky were having a discussion in the Kremlin about annihilating the anarchists groups, first in Moscow, then in the whole of Russia (they had already lost interest in Ukraine and so didn't touch the anarchists there). I found the envoy from the Red Guard headquarters in Yekaterinoslav was distressed by the fact that the Red Guard detachments, in accord with the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, were being withdrawn from the front lines of the revolutionary front in the direction of the Russian border, while the detachments made up of Ukrainian toilers, hastily organized, were not yet ready for combat and were falling back everywhere. I assured him that I would do everything possible to ensure that our troops would be advancing on the morrow to the Front.

After this envoy had left, I received news that the Red Guards had also retreated in the Alexandrovsk sector. The military command in Alexandrovsk implored the Gulai-Polye battalions to come to their aid. After consulting with the Revkom and the A-K Group, I sent to Alexandrovsk the detachment formed by the A-K Group and a mixed battalion formed from the peasants of hamlets closest to Alexandrovsk.

The detachment formed by the A-K Group was a cavalry formation. The Red Guards had almost no cavalry. Our detachment was soon required in the Yekaterinoslav military sector. In due course it was also redeployed, on my orders, in the Chaplino sector. Meanwhile we successfully prepared the Gulai-Polye, Konsko-Pasdorskii, Shanzharo-Turkenovskii, and other "free battalions" for action at the front.

CHAPTER 30

Yegorov's urgent summons – the loss of our military sector

It was a very tense moment. The Ukrainian nationalist organization seemed to be moribund. Its members didn't say anything, they mostly just did what they were asked to do.

The artillery and infantry were tuned up. We intended to advance but didn't have panoramic sights for our cannon. We sent a telegram to Belenkevich: could he not provide us with new panoramic sights? We didn't get an answer. At night Ukrainian SRs – the agronomist Dmitrenko and two youths – the fanatical nationalists P. Kovalenko and Mikita Konoplya – cut all the telegraph and telephone wires outside of Gulai-Polye. This deprived me of connections with the staff of the Red Army command. I made sure all the peasants were informed about this evil deed. After a few hours connections were re-established. I got word from Belenkevich that the panoramic sights and spare parts for the cannons and machine guns should be found in certain boxes in a certain railway car. Everything turned up and was distributed where needed.

In the meantime proclamations of the Ukrainian socialists-nationalists appeared in Gulai-Polye and throughout the raion explaining the alliance of the Central Rada with their German "brothers" who were helping the sons of Ukraine "liberate the Ukraine from the yoke of the katzaps". This proclamation concluded with an appeal to the population to help the Central Rada and its German and Austro-Hungarian brothers finish off the enemy... .

At the same time a rumour was spreading among the inhabitants of Gulai-Polye to the effect that the German troops were destroying all the towns and villages in their path which offered resistance to them and the Central Rada. And, on the other hand, those citizens who co-operated with them were

provided with all the necessities, including sugar, footware, and textiles.

More and more often and loudly began to be heard among the population outbursts such as: "—and what if the Germans burn villages?... Then they will burn Gulai-Polye!... What will happen to our children, our parents?!... ." And then one the agents of the Central Rada blurted out the word "delegation" which was quickly seized upon and repeated from one person to the next among the toilers of Gulai-Polye.

This word attracted my attention. I called a meeting of the Revkom, the Soviet, and the A-K Group and proposed to publish an appeal headed by the following lines: "The soul of the traitor and the conscience of the tyrant are as black as the night in springtime". I also wanted to organize a meeting to explain to the whole population of Gulai-Polye the provocational meaning of the term "delegation", etc.

At that very moment I learned that several supporters of the Central Rada had just arrived in Gulai-Polye and were trying to convince the population that they had been made prisoners by the Bolsheviks while returning from the External Front but had succeeded in escaping. I also learned that under the direction of the father of one of these so-called escapees, Tikhon Byk, a delegation was being prepared to treat with the German command.

I therefore asked the comrades to organize the meeting as quickly as possible and went looking for Tikhon Byk. When I found him, I demanded an explanation of this "delegation". He offered denials for a long time, but when he realized this was useless, he told me not to involve myself in this question: "It's the people's business." I left him in peace, declaring that for such an action the people themselves would wring his neck and do the same to all those who tried to defend him.

The appeal was published and the meeting convened, a meeting at which everyone agreed on the necessity of an immediate

Yegorov

departure for the front. During the meeting I received a telegram from the commander of a Red Guard detachment, Yegorov, summoning me urgently to his headquarters on the Verkhne-Tokmak-Fedorovka railway line.

I had to make a hurried trip to Commune #1, of which I was a member. I had received a report that about ten drunken sailors had arrived there from the headquarters of the Red Army reserve forces. They had shot one of the members of the Commune. It was necessary to get them out of there without more bloodshed. I succeeded in convincing the sailors to leave. Then I went to the station of Pologi and took the train for Yegorov's headquarters.

Half way there I learned that he had withdrawn in the direction of Uzovo, so I travelled on the branch line Verkhne-Tokmak – Tzarekonstantinova. At Tzarekonstaninova I met Belenkevich and his reserve armies which had retreated from Pologi. They had also lost touch with Yegorov's headquarters. They didn't expect to re-establish a connection until nightfall. I was worried about not having caught up with Yegorov by now. And the knowledge that I needed to be in Gulai-Polye on the morning of April 16, no matter what, increased my anxiety.

I had just decided not to spend any more time looking for Yegorov and return to Gulai-Polye when Comrade Belenkevich said to me: "If Comrade Yegorov summoned you, you must try to see him before leaving for the front. He has probably decided not to send your battalion to Chaplino because this sector had already been evacuated by us."

This news stunned me! I decided to wait for nightfall when Comrade Belenkevich had re-established contact with Yegorov's headquarters.

Around 9 p.m. I sent a telephone message to both the headquarters in Gulai-Polye and the Revkom, warning them that

I had been delayed for an indefinite period.

At midnight I received from Pologi, by way of Tsarekonstaninovka, news that Gulai-Polye had been traitorously surrendered to the Germans and the troops of the Central Rada.

I didn't believe this incredible news which bore no signature. However, at 1 a.m. I telephoned Pologi station and asked if they had sent the telephone message at midnight. The operator told me: "Yes, two young men with weapons came in and one of them sent the message you have received. He refused to provide a signature."

I tried to contact Gulai-Polye, but I was told that ***Gulai-Polye is not answering***.

Just as I was getting ready to leave for Gulai-Polye I received news that Yegorov's headquarters was at Volnovakha, about 45 or 50 kilometres from Tsarekonstaninovka. I decided to go there, but, when I arrived, I learned the Yegorov had already left for Dolya. I telegraphed: "Will Yegorov's headquarters stay long at Dolya?" and received the reply that it had already left for Taganrog.

I left the telegraph office and headed for the locomotive. At this moment Belenkevich's echelon arrived at the station. Who should jump down from the train but my nephew Foma (son of my oldest brother) who, looking distraught, handed me a letter.

I tore open the envelope and read what follows, which was already out of date:

"Nestor Ivanovich: no sooner had you left Gulai-Polye than Tikhon Bik also left with some of the nationalists. Two stories circulated here: one said that they were going to follow you and treacherously kill you... . So be very careful during your return trip, especially at Pologi station... . The second said that T. Bik left with a secret delegation from Gulai-Polye to the German forces. Immediately after he left, I sent two of

our friends to his home. His wife said that he had gone to visit relatives for two days... . I have just learned, while writing these lines, that some kind of delegation from the Central Rada and the German armies has arrived in Gulai-Polye. But it is hidden for the moment and not showing itself to the population. I have taken all measures to arrest this delegation... but am not sure of success. Please return quickly; without your presence we are all sad and depressed... . – signed: Your faithful B. Veretelnik. April 15, 1918.

I began to question my nephew about Gulai-Polye but my voice trembled and I was overcome with nervous exhaustion. Closing my eyes, I collapsed on a bench, motioning to my nephew that I couldn't listen to him... . A few minutes later I sat in my railway car and left for Tsarekonstaninovka – Pologi – Gulai-Polye.

As a result of the retreat of the echelons of the Red Guards, I was held up three or four hours between Volnovakha and Tsarekonstaninovka. Arriving at Tsarekonstaninovka, I received more news from Gulai-Polye, more worrisome still. I read:

"My dear Nestor Ivanovich. During the night of April 16, on a counterfeit order supposedly signed by you, the anarchist detachment was recalled from Chaplino and disarmed en route. All our comrades from Gulai-Polye, all the members of the Revkom and the Soviet have been arrested and expect to be turned over to the German military and Central Rada authorities to be executed. This treason was directed by the nationalists A. Volok, I. Volkov, Ossip Solovei, commander of artillery V. Sharovsky, and others. Three hours before we were arrested, the Jewish or Central Company was assigned garrison duty. The miserable traitors deceived the Jews and forced them to carry out their vile scheme.

"At the time of our arrest we were all disarmed and beaten with blows from rifle butts. Some of our guys who were still armed fired on the enemy.

"They say the bourgeoisie is gloating.

"Our friend Alexis Marchenko was apprehended by the leaders of the traitors but he succeeded in escaping. A group of young Jews was send to find him. Marchenko responded with a few shots, threw two or three grenades, and disappeared. But he was captured about 15 kilometres from Gulai-Polye by Jews from the Mezhirichi colony, taken to Gulai-Polye, and handed over to the headquarters of the traitors.

"They say that the mood of the peasants is downcast. There is hatred towards the Jews for their behaviour.

"I am transmitting this letter to you through the sentinel Sh., indicating through whom he can get it to you. If you receive it, come quickly with some kind of force to rescue us.

"Your faithful B. Veretelnik."

16 April. 9 a.m.

While I read this letter from Comrade Veretelnik, the detachment of Maria Nikiforova arrived at Tsarekonstaninovka station. I informed her of the events which had just unfolded in Gulai-Polye. She immediately telephoned the commander of a detachment of Red Guards, a certain sailor Polypanov who was currently engaged in combat with "White Guards" in Mariupol. Maria Nikiforova proposed that he return to Tsarekonstaninovka in order to launch an attack against Gulai-Polye with her.

The sailor Polypanov replied that he couldn't go back that way and advised Nikiforova to evacuate the Tsarekonstaninovka – Pologi area before the Germans cut off her retreat.

While this was going on, the detachment of the sailor Stepanov arrived in Tsarekonstaninovka and, shortly after, the Siberian detachment of Petrenko, composed of two echelons of cavalry and infantry.

Nikiforova asked Stepanov to return with her to Pologi and from there, with the protection of two armoured cars, move

on Gulai-Polye. Stepanov declared that he had attached to his echelon several wagons of fugitives which he was delivering to Comrade Belenkevich. Then he intended to go on to Taganrog. Indeed, he left immediately.

Nikiforova and Petrenko (the commander of the Siberian detachment) decided to return to Pologi and occupy Gulai-Polye by force in order to free all the anarchists and other revolutionaries being held there. They also intended to gather up the revolutionary armed forces which had been deceived and help them evacuate Gulai-Polye, or, at any rate, to collect any weapons which might otherwise fall into the hands of the Germans.

While the detachments were preparing to leave, I paced up and down the platform, tearing out my hair and regretting bitterly that I had not sent the detachment formed by the A-K Group from Gulai-Polye to the Front. Then I received a third letter from Comrade Veretelnik:

"My dear friend Nestor Ivanovich, the infamous leaders of the treason, terrified by I know not what, have freed me as well as Comrade Gorev on condition, however, that we leave Gulai-Polye.

"Comrade Gorev and I have profited from this circumstance to organize in each sotnia a meeting with the participation of the older peasants. At these meetings, the peasants voted for resolutions demanding the immediate release of everyone arrested, especially the anarchists, and sent these resolutions to the headquarters of the traitors. All our comrades were freed.

"Many of the young Jewish workers, and all of the bourgeoisie, with the exception of M. E. Helbuch and Levy[16], have run off somewhere for fear of vengeance. However no one here has laid a hand on them because all our comrades understand

16 Both were wealthy, but honest, Jews, having always observed in their lives the decisions taken at the general assemblies of the toilers and having always condemned the ancien regime. – N. Makhno

quite well that the leaders of the treason involved them in their scheme in order to set them up for a pogrom.

"The Germans are approaching Gulai-Polye. Our comrades are hiding in groups. The peasants are concealing the rifles, machine guns, and ammunition and are dispersing, some to the fields, some to the neighbouring villages.

"Some of my friends and myself plan to remain in Gulai-Polye up to the last minute. Perhaps we shall succeed in killing Lev Schneider. At the moment our comrades were arrested at the office of the A-K Group, he was the first to enter with the haidamaks. He ripped up our banner and tore up and trampled on the portraits of Kropotkin, Bakunin, and Sasha Semeniuta. This vile act was witnessed by numerous workers and peasants.

"I myself have not seen Lev Schneider, but I've heard from a number of sources that he has been blabbing away to the haidamaks. We'll talk about him later. Be careful not to fall into the paws of the Germans. It's better if you don't come to Gulai-Polye. You can't do anything more for us now: the Germans have occupied Orekhov and Pokrovskoe, and they will probably be in Gulai-Polye in two or three hours.

We will find you.

For the time being, we careful.

Your faithful B. Veretelnik

April 16, 3 p.m.

As soon as I finished reading this letter I hurried to Maria Nikiforova and together we ran to Comrade Petrenko. I read both of them the letter of Veretelnik and told them that it was my opinion that it was too late to go to Gulai-Polye which must already be occupied by the Germans. As for driving them out of Gulai-Polye, it was unthinkable with only our two detachments. Moreover, the Germans would be able to prevent us from getting anywhere close to Gulai-Polye.

If it was true they had occupied the city of Orekhov, it was then probable they were approaching Pologi. And if it was true the Red Guards had abandoned Chaplino to the Germans and evacuated Grichino, then Gulai-Polye was already well behind the German front.

Whereas Comrades Nikiforova and Petrenko had begun by putting me down, saying I understood nothing of their strategy and didn't appreciate the combat resources of their detachments, they now hastened to turn their echelons from the Pologi direction to the direction of Volnovakha. They stopped talking about Pologi and Gulai-Polye.

I asked them: "Why are you in such a hurry? Have you received some bad news about this sector?" M. Nikiforova replied that the Germans had occupied the stations of Pologui and Verkhne-Tokmak and that they had thereby cut off the anarchist detachment of Comrade Mokrousov on the Verkhne-Tokmak – Berdyansk line.

"If you wish," said M. Nikiforova, "you can sit in my wagon. I am going to give the order to my echelon to continue on in the direction of Volnovakha-Uzovka." And she added softly, with a slight smile, excusing herself: "You were totally right to say it was too late to go to Gulai-Polye. All the approaches are occupied by the Germans."

However I declined to retreat with M. Nikiforova's detachment, declaring I would remain there for the time being, especially since Petrenko's detachment had decided to spend the night there. I was hoping that some of my comrades from Gulai-Polye would show up. I had, indeed, upon first learning that Gulai-Polye had been betrayed to the Germans, sent Aleksandr Lepetchenko there with the mission of explaining to the "communards" the direction they must take in their flight and recommended that he accompany them. As for Comrades Veretel'nik, Gorev, Marchenko, Polonsky, Kalashnikov, Petrovsky, Lyutii, Savva Makhno, S. Shepel, M. Kalinichenko, P. Sokruta, and others, Alexander Lepetchenko

was to tell them to leave Gulai-Polye as quickly as possible and head for the Red Front. There they would find me.

During the time that Petrenko's detachment was at the Tsarekonstantinovka station, I was able to greet a number of comrades who had remained at Gulai-Polye up until the arrival of the German and Austro-Hungarian forces, preceded by a reconnaissance squadron of the Central Rada about 40 - 50 strong. They told me the story of everything that had happened in Gulai-Polye in the two days following my departure. They had tears in their eyes as they told me about the foul treason of Lev Schneider, a comrade of our Group, and of the Jewish regiment tricked by the gang of traitors.

They also told me about the entry of the German and Austro-Hungarian forces and the detachment of the Central Rada. They told about the local agents of the Central Rada, citizens of Gulai-Polye, in particular sub-lieutenants A. Volokh, I. Volkov, L. Sakhno-Prikhodko (SR), Pidoima, and some others – small fry but vicious – such as Ossip Solovei, V. Sharovsky (SR), and the agronomist Dmitrenko. This bunch prepared themselves to receive the hangmen of the Revolution – the Germans and Austro-Hungarians – hoping to prove that they were also killers of the Revolution and all that was best in it.

This creme-de-la-creme of the Ukrainian patriots, the so-called "flower of our people", were ready to follow the example of the German and Austro-Hungarian soldiers who, leaving their own countries to suffer from hunger and cold, leaving their fathers and mothers, their wives and children, had come here to kill their counterparts. The nationalists, not content with supporting these conscious or unconscious assassins, these destroyers of the people's revolutionary achievements, wanted to do worse things. They were ready to march at the head of these murderers and arsonists, fight the toilers, and drown them in blood. And all so that their masters, who had traitorously covered themselves with the flag of socialism,

would let them keep their gold epaulets as sub-lieutenants and their right to own the land.

These proclaimers of the idea of the occupation of revolutionary territory by the counter-revolutionary German and Austro-Hungarian armies, and the subsequent annihilation of the revolutionary toilers, handed over to the foreign troops as they passed through Gulai-Polye machine guns, hundreds of rifles, and our cannons!

The commander of the German forces thanked them for their "loyalty". These odious proclaimers of the idea of occupation, along with others who were in tune with the new counter-revolutionary regime, did not conceal their joy at this compliment from the powerful.

What a disgrace!

And so a desire for vengeance was born in the soil of the revolutionaries. Vengeance against all those who trampled on the toiling population, enslaved, tortured, crushed politically and socially.

No more pity for the enemies of the toilers! No more pity for all those who try to oppose our revolutionary activity! That's what I told my comrades then and that's how I acted.

The reader will see how this worked out in the next volumes of my memoirs.

GLOSSARY

A-K Group The Anarchist-Communist Group of Gulai-Polye, originally founded in 1905 by Vladimir Antoni and Alexander Semeniuta.

batrak a poor peasant who was forced to hire out as a day labourer. Makhno's father was a batrak.

Cheka the Extraordinary Commission, the original secret police organization set up by the Bolsheviks shortly after taking power.

Constituent Assembly a democratically elected national assembly which was supposed to develop a constitution for Russia and solve the land question. Its dismissal by the Left Bloc after sitting for only one day set the stage for civil war.

echelon troop train

External Front the Front against the Central Powers (the German, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman empires).

gubernia an adminstrative unit which can roughly be translated as "province". Yekaterinoslav was the administrative centre of a gubernia (also named Yekaterinoslav) which included several uyezds (including Alexandrovsk Uyezd).

haidamak an elite soldier of the Ukrainian nationalist armed forces. An archaic term which refers back to Ukrainian Cossack warriors of the 18th century.

Kadet member of the Constitutional Democratic Party, the liberal political party which represented the interests of the bourgeoisie in Russia.

katzap a derogatory Ukrainian word for "Russian".

khutor an isolated farmstead.

Left SR member of the Left Socialist-Revolutionary Party, formed in October 1917 from the left-wing of the SR Party.

Maximalist member of a political party which split off from the SRs in 1906 and rejected electoral politics. The Party was financed mainly through bank robberies.

Menshevik member of the moderate wing of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party.

Provisional Government the government of liberals and right-wing socialists which ruled Russia from March to November 1917. Unwilling to end the War or solve the land question, this government lurched from one crisis to another. Its leading figure was Alexander Kerensky.

Public Committee from March to November 1917 Public Committees were the local organs of the Provisional Government in Russia. They often co-existed with Soviets in a situation of dual-power.

pomeshchik owner of a large estate

raion an administrative unit, a subdivision of a uyezd. The village of Gulai-Polye was the administrative centre of a raion (also named Gulai-Polye) which included several other (much smaller) villages and hamlets.

Revkom Revolutionary Committee. After the October Revolution of 1917 local Soviets set up Revkoms to organize the military defense of the Revolution.

SD Social-Democrat. Makhno generally uses this term to refer to the Mensheviks rather than the Bolsheviks.

seim a Polish word for "parliament".

sotnia literally a group of hundred, so in a military context roughly equivalent to "company". In Cossack and Left

Bank Ukrainian towns the inhabitants were organized into sotnias which might be translated as "wards" although it originally had a military significance.

SR member of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party (PSR), the largest left-wing party in Russia, which claimed to represent the interests of the peasantry. Socialist but non-Marxist, it was prone to factionalism and underwent a number of splits. In Ukraine were found nationalist variants of the SR Party.

uyezd an administrative unit, a subdivision of a gubernia. Alexandrovsk was the administrative centre of a uyezd (also named Alexandrovsk) which included several raions (including Gulai-Polye Raion).

zemstvo a local organ of government in the tsarist Russia. The Zemstvos in rural areas were dominated by landowners.